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After two postponements in the same day (7 September), the Supreme Court of Maldives, finally announced its verdict, annulling the first round of Presidential Elections.

It was not a unanimous decision and there was a split of 4:3, with the Chief Justice holding the minority view. This judgement had many faults but since it comes from the highest court of the land, the MDP has to accept the verdict and move on rather than continue the protests as it had threatened to do earlier.

No doubt the MDP who had 45.45 percent of the votes felt aggrieved. Some points that need to be highlighted in the verdict were

First, the majority ruling given by the judges included Ali Hameed who should not have been in the bench at all after his sexual exploits in Colombo are known to everyone in Maldives by now. The complainant in this case, Gasim had voted against the JSC's investigating subcommittee's own recommendations to suspend the judge.

Second, the verdict was based on a "confidential " report made by the Police to the court alleging that 5623 votes (how could one be so exact?) were ineligible. This report has not been made public, and was not shown to the defence lawyers of the Election Commission either. Since this figure exceeded the narrow margin of the 2nd and 3rd contenders, the whole election is considered to be illegitimate according to one of the Judges, Justice Didi.

Third, hearsay and speculative testimony from 14 anonymised witnesses introduced by the counsel of the Jumhooree party, the

complainant has also been taken into account.

The Supreme Court has directed that fresh presidential elections will be rescheduled for October 20 and the second round if required is to be held on November 3.

Certain guide lines have also been given by the Court that includes a. ensuring that only voters above 18 years of age are allowed for voting b. the voter list to be signed and finger printed by all the candidates and visibly displayed c. enhancement of security measures for the ballot boxes d. reprint ballot papers with additional security measures e. separate ballot box for people registered with Male municipality register and some more.

One controversial observation made by the majority in their judgement is that the failure to elect a President by November 11 does not mean that the present government will come to an end on that date. This is against the constitutional provisions and it would have been better if the Supreme Court had directed all the stake holders to complete the elections before November 11. This observation is likely to be exploited by the losing candidates in the coming election.

The crowds that had gathered before the court to hear the judgement were mainly the MDP supporters and they were disappointed. As one observer pointed out, there was an air of "latent anger, disappointment and determination."

The worry should be that the protesters do not resort to violence though provocations are many. The main TV station supporting the MDP, Raajje was torched by miscreants in the early hours of 7th morning. There could be targeted harassment by the police on those who had participated in the marches of the MDP in the last one week. One example is the house arrest of former education minister Shifa Mohamed for "participating in the demonstrations." Gayoom's party wants the Police to invoke terrorist laws to book those in the procession who carried "sticks." This is what Gayoom did when Nasheed was booked on terrorist laws during his period for peacefully protesting in a public place!

One good development has been a very responsible reaction from the MDP leaders. "We will beat them down with votes" was the immediate reaction that was being heard.

MDP member of the Majlis Ibrahim Soleh made three points **One:** the party will get ready to vote on the dates decided. **Two:** the party will work towards winning the election in the first round itself. **Three:** the party will not recognise Dr. Waheed as President after November 11. (this is against the observation of the Supreme Court.)

It is tough for Nasheed to keep his supporters under control. Any breakdown in law and order may result in the army taking over as is being rumoured in the social circles. The approach as made out should be "**Beat them with Votes.**"

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