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On 8th of April, the Maldives Bar Association renewed its call for the suspension of Supreme Court Judge Ali Hameed pending investigations into allegations of the judge's appearance in a series of sex tapes. The Bar contended that Hameed's presence in the Supreme Court Bench contravenes the Islamic Shariah and the norms of justice. The result is that the Bar Council is itself being de recognised!

The Judicial Service Commission of Maldives had set in motion cases against Judge Hameed in May and again in December 2013. The recommendation of December 2013 is still pending. This delay of over 4 months is reported to have undermined the public trust in the judiciary. The sex tapes are not the only ones under investigation.

Maldives media has reported various other cases of corruption of the Judge which were also to be investigated. These include

- a. Illegal transfer of credit from the state funded mobile account to his personal account in 2010.
- b. Tapes showing Judge Hameed discussing with a local businessman of the political influence on the judiciary and there is a hint that the present power holders can manipulate the judiciary.
- c. A 2010 audit reported an expenditure of MVR 13,200 to repair a state-owned car when there was evidence to show that there was no damage to the car. On the other hand some repairs were done in 2011.

d. A Sum of MV 50,000 from the state funds was spent for personal purposes during the judge's visit to China.

e. Since 2012, the judge has been illegally occupying the State owned apartments in Male.

To cap this all, now comes the news, that the documents relating to the corruption cases against Judge Hameed were destroyed due to a "Coffee spill" at the Supreme Court Premises. The destruction of the documents could not have been accidental and could not have been done without the connivance of people now in power. It is no surprise that the opposition MDP has expressed its surprise and concern over the developments.

In one of the blogs I came across some details of the state of judiciary in Maldives. It says that Maldives has no criminal procedure act, witness protection act or Evidence Act. According to the Global Corruption barometer, 69 percent of the judiciary is "extremely" corrupt. 50 percent of the judges are said to have only 7th grade education and the only qualification they have is a 6 months or a two-year course certificate!

The Supreme Court in Maldives is said to have suddenly woken up on the need for reforms though it looks that it is being undertaken to ward off international criticism. The Court has formed a "Law Reform Committee" that would consist of

a. All judges of the Supreme Court Bench (Note- this would include Judge Hameed too)

b. The State Attorney General, Mohamed Anil.

c. The Home Minister, Umar Naseer.

d. Minister of Finance and Treasury Abdulla Jihad

e. Prosecutor General (position now vacant)

f. The Commissioner of Police Ali Waheed.

The purpose of the Committee is said to be to examine the basic direction of judiciary reform in Maldives with a view to setting out a reform package to be implemented. The Supreme Court has also noted that Committee's reform work will focus on strengthening the criminal justice system, civil justice system, family justice system and the juvenile justice system.

What is needed in Maldives is not just reforms but a thorough cleanup of the judicial system in all aspects. A large committee of the type with

the kind of members in it would only perpetuate, what one has described as the "tyranny" of the judiciary. Till this is rectified, there is no hope of democracy taking firm roots in Maldives.

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