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Maldives: Moving Towards Despotism

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The signs are getting stronger- Maldives appears to be moving towards despotism. The latest in the series is the sudden and hurried sacking of the Defence Minister after a raid of his premises by the Police.

What should be worrying is not of President Yameen consolidating his position but the sinister way by which he is going about it by disregarding all constitutional norms.

Transparency Maldives in one of the reports (3rd August of last year) referred to the “stagnation in democratic consolidation and a reversal in democratic gains.” It also pointed out the lack of outcry in the instances where the powers of key democratic institutions have been undermined.

Since then, Maldives has been going further downhill in the democratic process. But the lack of outcry may not continue indefinitely and at some stage or other there could be a backlash that would have an adverse impact on the law and order situation in the whole country!

The case of the Defence Minister:

On the night of January 18, Police officials on a warrant received from the court raided the residence of the Defence Minister Mohamed Nazim. Nazim was not present in the house and the Police used force to break open the doors of the two apartments of the minister. A spokesman of the Commissioner of Police Ahmed Shifan said that they found dangerous weapons in his house.

On 22nd January, President Yameen dismissed Nazim, of a result of a Police Investigation into illegal weapons being kept in the minister's house. There has been no announcement on the type or number of weapons retrieved from the Minister's house. It is heard that only one revolver was found which people say could also have been planted by the Police. Initial reports said that only some documents were seized. Nazim was never given a chance to explain his position.

Nazim was one of the leading protestors involved in the overthrowing of former President Nasheed. He was appointed to that position by Dr. Waheed, Nasheed's successor in February 2012

The new Minister of defence is none other than Maj. Gen (ret'd) Moosa Ali who was formerly Chief of Defence Forces in Nasheed's time. In January 2013 in his deposition, he is said to have admitted that former President Nasheed had indeed resigned under duress. Criminal charges for illegally detaining Criminal Court Chief Judge Abdulla are still pending against him.

These cases are connected to the case against Nasheed also where there is an attempt from Government sources to go slow on the cases. The hope is that with the cases hanging over his head, the Defence Minister will "behave." But this is not working and will not work with Nasheed who has called for speedy disposal of the cases against him.

JSC Appointment:

President Yameen has appointed Justice Ali Hameed to the Judicial Commission in place of the JSC President Justice Adam Mohamed who resigned for personal reasons.

Justice Hameed was involved in the famous sex tapes that went viral in the media. The Police dropped the investigation on two grounds- one that the picture in the video could not be definitely identified as that of the judge. But the second reason given bordered on the ridiculous. It was that the video was not captured by an "authorised person." It means that the tape could be true but it should be done by a state authorised photographer! How does one expect an authorised photographer to be invited for filming a sex escapade in a bed room and that too in Colombo?

There were corruption charges also against Judge Ali Hameed. The case had to be closed as the documents were supposed to have been destroyed by a "coffee spill." Hameed is said to be close to President Yameen and that nothing will happen to him.

More surprising was that the appointment of Justice Hameed to the JSC had the consent of other Supreme Court Judges! Aishath Velizinee, a former JSC member pointed out how low the courts have fallen!

This appointment comes at a time when two "inconvenient judges" were summarily removed recently by President Yameen from the

Supreme Court Bench without giving any reason for the dismissal.(See our paper No. 5847)

Target Gasim:

With the Army, Judiciary and the Majlis behind him, Yameen has only two “inconvenient political leaders”- Gasim of Jumhooree party and Nasheed of the MDP against him.

As a first step he is seen to be targeting Gasim who is perhaps the richest businessman of Maldives. In September last year, President Yameen in order to “muzzle” Gasim in one stroke tried to destroy Gasim’s business by taking away the private airport of Maamigili of Villa Air. After some interval, the airport was not only returned to the Villa Air but was also upgraded and recognised as an international airport! Gasim had since been making only ‘friendly’ noises!

It looks that Gasim’s property is still being targeted. Nasheed in a public rally on the 19th of December, pledged to defend Gasim. He said “Gasim’s property cannot be looted. Gasim’s character and body cannot be harmed. We shall rally in his defence.”

On 21st January, the MDP conducted a street rally in front of Gasim’s residence to show solidarity with the Jumhooree party leader in defending the constitution. The rally was addressed by all the top leaders of the MDP.

It sounds strange that Yameen who could not have become President without the valuable support of Gasim Ibrahim should turn against the latter. And now the person who was defeated and who should hold some grudge against Gasim is coming to his support!

I dread to think of the consequences if Yameen is to try the same tactics to destroy Nasheed of the MDP who by all accounts is still the most popular political leader in Maldives. If something happens to him, the whole of Maldives could be in flames!

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