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Maldives: Democracy Back Sliding

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The Maldivian Democracy Network said that Maldives is back sliding into repression with the government stifling dissent and restricting constitutional rights. This appears to be a very mild statement! Maldives is going back to medieval era with all powers concentrated in President Yameen.

For Yameen the incident of the explosion? in the Presidential boat on arrival from Haj has come as a "God send" to purge his kingdom of all opposition. With the judiciary and other constitutional bodies under his full control, Yameen is purging every known and would be personalities who may obstruct his passage to a second term as President. His fall out with his second in command for the second time can only be explained that the latter was emerging as his probable rival!

In this process, two Vice Presidents, two Defence chiefs, Attorney General, Election commission members, two inconvenient judges, former President who had obtained almost fifty percent of popular votes, and scores of others have been either imprisoned or driven to exile.

President of the Adhalat party has been slapped with terror charges for leading a May day rally and no charges or trials were initiated for six months. He is still languishing in jail.

The President of the Jumhooree party the third largest Gasim Ibrahim with whose help President Yameen got elected, was humiliated and made to bow down when his assets were to be seized by the government.

Public rallies by the opposition in demanding the release of former President Nasheed have been banned indirectly using other constitutional

agencies. The only two opposing parties have been heavily fined by the Election Commission for displaying the UN symbol in the rallies.

A new rule was introduced by the EC that all members will have to be re registered forcing the main opposition to fan out to the whole kingdom to get the thumb impressions. Legal and procedural hurdles were placed in getting the fingerprints of former president Nasheed now confined to jail.

Lawyers licenses are being suspended at the drop of a hat and the individuals are not being informed of the reasons either. This is being done selectively to those defending purged leaders who are in jail. One particular case is worth noting. The Supreme Court suspended former Vice Presidents lawyer Hussain Shammed for “contempt of court” and the Police are now after him for framing charges!

On 18 November, the Home Minister, a loose cannon in his own right declared that he would influence the judiciary in order to punish those responsible for the blast in the Presidential speed boat. No action was taken by the ever vigilant judiciary for this statement and on the other hand there was a pious declaration that the government of Maldives respects the rule of law and reaffirm the position that its judiciary is “fully independent and impartial”. What hypocrisy?

Political dissenters and inconvenient opposition members have all been put in jail on terrorism charges and given long years of sentence.

The new anti terrorism law now promulgated has many vague formulations and there is full scope for the present government to misuse the provisions even more when the judiciary and other constitutional arms are fully under the control of the President. Terms like “undue influence against the government,” unlawful promotion of a particular political, religious or other ideology,” “creation of fear among the public or within specified groups” are all too general and waiting to be exploited by any authoritarian dispensation.

Surprisingly, the new anti terror law does not include religious extremism and more surprisingly the judiciary has been given discretionary powers to decide which literature promotes terrorism.

It may be recalled that the opposition MDP was tricked into cooperation for constitutional amendments to be passed in the Majlis in return for release of former president Nasheed. A genuine document with government seal was handed over to Nasheed’s relatives commuting the sentence to house arrest. The Security authorities who could not have acted without instructions from “above’ forcibly took Nasheed away from his home to Mafushii jail claiming that the document was a forged one. The forensic authorities have since declared (on 7th Dec) that the document was genuine. The government is silent still and no action has been taken against the security personnel who created a big drama before Nasheed’s house and no action has been taken either to implement the order.

Now Nasheed has been forced to appeal over his sentence and the President is “waiting” for the entire judiciary process to be over before taking a view on the continued detention of Nasheed. The judiciary will take its own time unless Yameen wants to expedite it..

A favorite of the President, Hussein Sharief who had been running the office of President since Gayoom's times was made to resign when it was found that he had given a contract of 3.7 million MV to his favourite contractor and then overspent double that amount for a banquet by the President. Based on documentary evidence alone Sharief could have been convicted. But the Prosecution has already dropped the charges against him for “want of evidence.”

The list could go on. There are many more. But this paper will not be complete without discussing the case of former Vice President Adheeb in whom President Yameen had earlier 500 percent confidence!

Former Vice President who was inducted after a major constitutional amendment is now awaiting trial on some specific and some unspecified charges. One who was sipping tea with Chinese President Xi Jinping is now within a few days being made to count cockroaches in a solitary jail.

It all started with an explosion in the Presidential speed boat on 28 September. It is still doubtful whether it was an explosion at all as the FBI with ten samples did not find any trace of any explosive substance while the Saudis with their superior skills discovered explosive material with a lesser number of samples.

The Vice President's absence to receive the President was the first indication that he was involved. Subsequently the home minister and everyone downwards had already convicted him through direct and indirect statements. He was summarily expelled from the ruling party and impeached in the parliament in a hurry after an emergency was declared.

Initially when the arrest was made, it was mentioned that it was to prevent his influencing the investigations that he was being isolated. Subsequently his close associate Abdulla Ziyath and his distant relative Hamid Ismail were arrested and defalcations running into millions were discovered in running the tourism industry.

Yet no concrete evidence of Adheeb being involved in any terrorism act has been found by the Police so far. Suddenly, there was a discovery of someone having seen a hand gun in Adheeb's house five months ago. This should be sufficient for the Police to put Adheeb under terrorism laws and it is a question of time before more such evidence leading to charges under terrorism will be produced.

While India and China are bending backwards to please Yameen and enter into long term strategic and economic cooperation, it is Britain and particularly David Cameron who has consistently opposed the regime. One can understand China doing it as they love dictators but I am not sure what is driving India to do so.

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