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Maldives: A Surprise Victory for Opposition Candidate Solih!

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In a surprise result, the opposition candidate Ibrahim Mohamed Solih won the Presidential election with an overwhelming majority with 58.3 percent of the total votes. Present President Yameen conceded defeat and is said to have personally met Solih to congratulate him.

Yameen had to bite the dust and despite all the hurdles placed before the opposition candidate, Solih won hands down. It is not a question of whether Yameen or Solih won. It is the people of Maldives who have won and thus have saved democracy from the tyrannical rule of Yameen.

Yameen followed the dictum that “If you can’t make people love you, make them fear you”. He has justly been punished by the electorate and may end up running away to another country to enjoy his loot if he is unable to overturn the result by other means.

Solih received 134616 votes of a total of 233,616 votes as against Yameen who obtained 96,132 votes. The voter turn out was unusually high with 89.22 percent and this indicated that the people for once did not fear the incumbent Yameen and voted for the opposition Candidate Solih.

The official results are to be announced within the next seven days, before 30 September 2018. Yameen's constitutionally prescribed five-year term ends on November 17. The elected President and the Vice-President, are expected to be sworn in on or after 17 November 2018.

What is remarkable is that despite using the official machinery, putting all the possible candidates either in jail or in exile, muzzling the Press and using every method to stifle the opposition, the opposition candidate has won. This is indeed an astounding victory of the people.

In the many twitter messages, we notice that Yameen despite conceding defeat is trying his best to stay in power and most probably he may still the ever willing judiciary to help him in the hope. It is hoped that the people who have voted overwhelmingly for the opposition candidate will not let this happen.

Solih's victory has been widely welcomed by the international community including India and China. China's response came a day late.

As said earlier, it is a resounding democratic victory for the people of Maldives. The election was widely regarded more as a referendum. People had come out in great numbers to end the tyranny and corruption.

The entire opposition Mohamed Nasheed (MDP), Sheikh Imran Abdulla (AP), Gasim Ibrahim (JP) got united including Yameen's half-brother former President of three decades joined hands to end the tyranny of Yameen and they succeeded. It now remains to be seen whether the unity shown in the run up to the elections will continue in providing the people a corrupt free government.

Solih has already declared that he would promote human rights and the rule of law. He has also urged the incumbent President to ensure a smooth and peaceful transfer of power. He has also a tremendous responsibility to undo all the misdeeds of the previous government. The first task will be to release all the political leaders who have been unlawfully jailed or driven into exile on charges of "terrorism." Some leaders and some suspects of the winning party who were arrested prior to the election have been released. More should follow soon.

There are many challenges for the new government and most of them are urgent and need immediate attention. The first will of course be the release of all those who have unjustly been imprisoned. Some have been jailed under criminal charges and the procedure to release them will be cumbersome. Other challenges will include

- The debt trap, thanks to China.
- Neighborhood policy
- Democratic institutions to be set right
- Most of the Constitutional Bodies have become politicised. They will have to be reformed and rehabilitated. Election commission as many complaints against them
- Judiciary was totally humiliated and used as a tool. This needs to change.
- Repealing of Repressive laws
- Has to correct the distortion in Institutional Mechanisms

- Armed forces will have to be de- politicised

India should welcome the developments but it should leave it to the new President as to what kind of relationship they should have with India. The problem for the new Government will be more with China that has invested heavily in Maldives in the hope that Yameen would continue. Some way will have to be found out to repay the debts without getting into another “Hambantota Trap” that Sri Lanka had experienced

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