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## **MALDIVES: Ruling coalition Partners become Rivals in Parliamentary election**

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By R M Panda

Politics is the game of compulsions, limitations and contradictions. The Ruling Coalition- those who fought jointly in a Presidential election to defeat a tyrant, are now fighting separately and competing with each other as well and with independent and opposition candidates in this upcoming Parliamentary Election.

When the MDP decided to field its own candidates for all the Parliamentary seats unilaterally, it is inevitable that the coalition which stood together could breakup in the near future unless saner minds in all the parties in the coalition realise the consequences. But Nasheed and Gasim seem to have other ideas!

President Solih looked quite confident when he said that “we made this coalition knowing that there would be disagreements and with the understanding that we would move forward despite these disagreements”. He believes that the problem between Nasheed and Gasim is just a difference of opinion and can be sorted out. Is it that Simple?

But the ground reality is different and much more critical. Gasim has a pre poll alliance with the main opposition party PPM and PNC (People's National Congress). PNC is a recently created party created by lawmakers and loyalists of Ex-President Yameen who feared that the Supreme Court would hand over control of PPM's leadership to former president Maumoon Abdul Gayoom. The Supreme court has since ordered that ex-President Yameen would retain the PPM's presidential position and subsequently the party leadership.

According to an understanding between Gasim (JP) and the PPM-PNC, only in 14 constituencies there is going to be a direct fight between the two- Gasim's and Yameen's Parties. In the rest, Gasim's (JP) candidates are fighting in 46 constituencies. PPM-PNC has endorsed 27

of JP candidates whereas, JP has endorsed 32 of their candidates.

Though Gasim is claiming that the agreement with PPM is only to fight the parliamentary elections together to secure maximum number of seats, in actual practice he is doing his best to favour Yameen- the man who had jailed him on trumped up charges earlier.

In return, Gasim is seen to be favouring Yameen in many other ways. Using his constitutional position as Speaker he has sabotaged the Presidential Commission Bill intended to recover stolen assets and to investigate unresolved murders. He removed the bill from the agenda of the parliament and returned it to the committee. Further to the embarrassment of the MDP and President Solih, Gasim also stalled the government sponsored Legal Profession bill and removed it from the agenda.

If this President commission bill had been passed it would have been a big setback for ex-President Yameen who is under house arrest on corruption charges. . In support of Yameen, Gasim in his election rallies has started openly criticising the Criminal Court's order to detain the former president Yameen and demanding his immediate release. Gasim appears to have lost his head!

But Gasim's wife, the Transport Minister Aishath Nahula has publically opposed her party's decision to support opposition candidates and declared her stand to remain with the government. She believes that JP will continue to remain in the Government Coalition. She contends that Gasim and his son who were among those with several other political opponents jailed or forced to go into exile during Yameen's period cannot now suddenly support their tormentors.

Other cabinet ministers from JP including the tourism minister Ali Waheed and the Environment minister Hussain Rasheed have declared their allegiance to President Solih.

Complaining about the double standards of JP, MDP MP Eva Abdulla asked them to make their stand clear. She said JP can't be in a coalition with the government and as well as with the opposition.

Opposition party PPM is seriously trying to take the full advantage of this friction among the ruling coalition. Just to stir the muddy waters, opposition lawmaker Abdul Raheem Abdulla is proposing that Gasim should lead a national unity Government by joining hands with the opposition. MP Ahmed Nihan is suggesting that Vice President Faisal Naseem could succeed President Solih

Responding to former President Nasheed's statement that a coup is happening to stop MDP from getting the majority in parliamentary election, Gasim said that if there is a coup it will be instigated by Nasheed himself. Gasim alleged that Nasheed doesn't want to wait for 5 years and wants to assume the presidency sooner than that. Furthermore, Gasim also said that it is Nasheed who wants to become a prime minister after changing the system to a parliamentary system and his aim is to assume the position of the Head of State before the end of President Solih's term.

Without any doubt we can see that the fight between two leaders Gasim and Nasheed is weakening the Solih government and the ultimate sufferer of this power tussle will be the people of Maldives. The obvious result would be that the tyrant Yameen would not only go scot free but could climb up the power ladder by money power and other nefarious means.!

Former president Abdul Gayoom's Maldives Reform Movement which is yet to be formally registered is also fielding several candidates for the April 6<sup>th</sup> Parliamentary Election. Gayoom backed candidates are his elder son Farris Maumoon, Aminath Nadira and former deputy speaker Ahmed Nazim and many more. Gayoom reaffirmed support for President Solih and MDP. Gaymoom's younger son Ghassan is contesting under former president Yameen's PPM. Gayoom has endorsed a rival candidate running against Ghassan.

Another coalition partner in the government Adhaalath Party is also fighting with its nine candidates without making any alliance with any other party.

President Solih is trying his best to grab the votes for MDP by stressing the importance of their manifesto pledges under Agenda 19. Basic form of Agenda 19 consists of the party's legislative agenda including the bills to introduce a minimum wage, unemployment benefits, a personnel income tax, strengthening the assets disclosure regime, pursuing traditional justice and reforming the judiciary and many more. Solih being a childhood friend of Nasheed could advise the latter to go slow and be more accommodative to others in the coalition.

According to the Election commission of Maldives a total number of 395 candidates are fighting for the 87 parliamentary constituencies. Out of this 395, 360 are male candidates and 35 are female candidates. A total number of 264,589 people will be eligible to vote.

Permutations and combinations for this Parliamentary elections that go across party lines, families, old enemies and friends are mind boggling. One wished that Nasheed had been a little more flexible after having learnt a lesson of his life in not only being deprived of his presidency but also being incarcerated and thus throwing the country into turmoil. Gasim has not shed his arrogance despite being in exile for long and his thriving business almost destroyed.

It is learnt that the Indian Foreign Minister is visiting Maldives. Wish she could put some sense into the warring leaders!

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