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President Ibrahim Solih and his party MDP won the Presidential election and also the Parliamentary elections back to back within a span of six months. Election results of MDP's super majority in Parliamentary elections outshone the rest of the political parties. Out of all total 87 Parliamentary seats MDP won in 65 seats, (PPM + PNC) got 8 seats, JP 5 seats, MDA 2 seats and (MRM + MRM supported Independent) got 7 seats. Some 44 incumbent MP's mostly from the opposition and JP and some independent candidates failed to get re-elected. In this 100% Sunni Islamic country only four female candidates were able to win in this election out of 37 female candidates who contested. The total number of candidates who participated in this election was 386.

Though the present Speaker Gasim managed to win his parliamentary seat, his party-the JP performed poorly in this election as the number MPs elected came down to 5 from 15. Gasim was a popular leader in his own right and had managed to have a good following because of his charity activities where poor people benefitted from his benevolence. He lost all these in one stroke by aligning himself with the tyrant Yameen even after he was humiliated and persecuted by the latter during latter's term of Presidentship!

The Opposition party PPM also shuffled its leadership after defeats in the presidential and parliamentary elections. They have elected three new deputy leaders as Vice Presidents to the party. Significantly it includes Ghasan Maumoon, son of former President Gayoom. The other two Vice Presidents of the Party are Ahmed Shiyam and Dr. Mohamed Muizzu. Yameen, an autocrat as he is, chose the names himself without going through the rules of the party and did not let anyone else to contest. Ghassan was not even present during the voting!

The PNC (branch of PPM) is also in the process of electing its leaders as required party laws. As the founding member of the party Mohamed Hussain Shareef's statement, a president, two deputies and 20 council members will soon be elected. There is no doubt that this

party is a sub group of PPM and all the members and the party will be under tight control of Yameen.

Former President Nasheed who had a big role to play in being successful in the elections had spoken extensively on many issues like, changing of presidential system to a parliamentary system, on foreign judges and judicial reform, MDP's alleged anti-Islamic policies, enacting the MDP's Agenda-19, anti-defection law, environmental protection and unity within MDP's parliamentary group etc. The list is long and time is short. But the priority of the new government should be to tackle the corruption that has got embedded into this system and is pervasive everywhere.

The next priority should be to strengthen independent bodies like Anti-corruption commission, Human right commission, Elections commission, Civil service commission and the Auditor General's office. The current administration is in the process to change the composition of the Judicial Service Commission too. Yameen had successfully destroyed every independent organisation and it is going to take a long time for such independent Commissions to gain some respect and credibility. The Judicial Commission needs special attention.

Much to the chagrin of the Chinese ,the foreign freehold policy (leasing of Maldivian territory for 99 years to outsiders done under Yameen) has been blocked successfully by this government.

Speaker Gasim ignoring the criticism of MDP MP's managed to push through new laws in the last days of this Parliament. Some lucrative bills in favour of the lawmakers who failed to win their re-election have been passed. These need to be reviewed.

MDP MP Eva Abdulla who is among one of the lucky female MP's to have won in this 2019 Parliamentary election condemned the urgency in passing the bills and said that the new Parliament with MDP's majority should repeal the controversial privileges granted under the bills rushed through by Gasim in his last days as Speaker.

The ongoing 18th parliament which started in May 28, 2014, concluded its final sitting last Monday and broke for a one-month recess before the end of its five-year term. As per the regulations, the newly elected MP's will take their oath on the day the 18th parliament will officially end on 28th may 2019.

Maldives China Relation

It will be a great challenge for this government to manage the Chinese debts accumulated under Yameen's regime. The debt is mostly in the form of sovereign guarantees on Chinese loans to companies. Latest finance ministry data shows that these guarantees amount to \$935 million.

This Government has also till now kept in abeyance the free trade agreement entered into with China . Maldives has also to reorient and review the projects agreed to under the BRI as is being done by other countries who are also facing the "debt trap." It was interesting to note

that out of eight SAARC member states, only Pakistan and Nepal sent their heads of governments to 2nd BRI forum. It has been six months now since this new government has taken over but neither President Solih nor his Foreign minister has visited China so far.

On the loan repayment issue, the Chinese Ambassador Zhang Lizhong said that China is ready to address the Maldives' concerns and it can be discussed freely at a high level discussion between the governments.

President Solih has expressed his concerns over the high interest rates of Chinese loans and has called for re negotiation with the Chinese government.

Maldives India Relations

Since President Solih came to power, many high level visits have been exchanged between Maldives and India. India is committed to help Maldives by addressing their development priorities and challenges. Export Import Bank of India has signed an agreement with Maldives to make available the credit worth \$800 million for a variety of development project out of the \$ 1.4 billion financial assistance committed by Indian Prime minister Modi.

President Solih made a short visit to India for two days that concluded a week ago. During his visit he met with the BCCI (Board of Control for Cricket in India) and discussed about building a cricket stadium in Maldives. He also watched the IPL cricket match in Bangalore. India has agreed to support and develop the infrastructure in Maldives for Indian Ocean Island Games 2023.

According to the agreement between both the countries, Indian Experts are in the process to restore and conserve the 17th century UNESCO World Heritage Listed 'Hukuru Miskiy' - Male' Friday Mosque.

Maldives is the country with 1200 islands stretching over a latitude distance of 850 kilometre and it claims a huge exclusive Economic zone . India is helping Maldives to protect its maritime boundaries by setting up a coastal surveillance radar chain in the island nation. The radar chain will provide a comprehensive live feed of ship movements in the Indian Ocean Region.

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