

Gayoom Plays “Political Musical Chairs”

Gayoom decided that presidential terms should be limited to two. That makes sense. Even in established democracies like the USA they go through the practice, partly because of the fear that one man ruling for too long could get too powerful, too dictatorial and too corrupt. Gayoom is in his sixth five year term and he is all of the above.

An ordinary human being following simple logic would assume that Gayoom would, if he is sincere, adhere to his deeply held principles and resign. Gayoom is neither sincere nor is he bound by principles.

As a substitute for his resignation, Gayoom now wants to change his minions who he has empowered. Also give some of his posts to subservient slaves while retaining actual power. One of his most docile slaves, that backboneless wonder, Ismail Shafeeu is Minister of Defense while he, Gayoom, retains – as he pointed out – the post of Commander – in – Chief.

Gayoom’s business partner Ahmed Abdulla has been changed from the Ministry of Health to run his propaganda as Minister of Information. Ahmed Abdulla is eminently qualified for the job: He is a die-hard Gayoom loyalist and, like others who held the post before him, he has not yet completed his secondary education. Gayoom’s semiliterate brother-in-law who was earlier propaganda chief is now Minister of Youth and Sports.

Gayoom understands the tremendous service rendered by his younger brother Abdulla Hameed who in the past 26 years helped retain him in power, remains in the crucial post of Minister of Atolls Administration. Gayoom

knows with the parliamentary elections around the corner he needs the competent service of Hameed to ensure that vote-rigging goes smoothly. Island Chiefs and other officials are handpicked by Hameed based on one criterion: loyalty to himself and Gayoom. Less than 20% of island chiefs and their deputies have gone through secondary education.

Justice Minister Ahmed Zahir is now Speaker of the Majlis. Zahir has the unique distinction of being the only incumbent minister who lost his parliamentary seat to two new contestants. That, in the eyes of Gayoom, of course, makes him eminently suitable as Speaker. Who the people rejects Gayoom imposes on the representatives of the people. What is surprising is why Zahir lost the Justice portfolio. With so many political trials looming, Gayoom needs a minister who will manipulate the trials exactly the way he wants. Gayoom is, of course, the final judicial authority and he has an entire panel under the Office of the President who help him manipulate the legal process. Justice is too important an issue to be delegated. The NSS (under his stewardship) torture and extract information suitable for Gayoom, the Attorney General would prosecute exactly along the lines determined by Gayoom and, of course, the judges will pass sentence exactly as instructed by Gayoom. It is a neat, precise system that avoids tension created by separation of powers. In various interviews and over national media, Gayoom has found the pro-democracy activists guilty of high treason – some among them actually called for, not only the resignation of his hard-line brothers, but for his own resignation as well.

In Gayoom’s mind treason cannot go any higher.

The police have been brought under the Ministry but surprisingly Head Torturer remains only the Commissioner of Police and has not yet been promoted as Minister of Home Affairs. Perhaps during these trying times, with almost all dissidents in jail, Head Torturer Adam Zahir’s expertise on torture and extraction of “confessions” is more urgently required. All indications are that the Torturer is doing a very competent job. Once this phase is over, the speculation is that he will be promoted as Minister of Justice. Hopefully then the long detention and recreational torture of detainees would be replaced by shorter, more purposeful torture under a special unit directly supervised by the Minister of (In)justice. However, as before, Gayoom will continue to give overall direction in the case of torture of political detainees.

Yes, one may expect this charade of musical chairs to go on. However what one may not expect, if one is reasonable, is change of any substance. Gayoom, for example, may very well limit the presidential term to two. Hang around for 17 years and Gayoom may well come with a constitution that limits his terms. By then he would be dictator for 43 years and two terms of 30 years each term would give him an additional 60 years: a grand total of 103 years as despot. After this the country can be ready for meaningful change instead of playing “political chairs” – provided the family business of “lording” over the Maldives is not passed on Gayoom’s great grandchildren or provided Gayoom is not embalmed and, after a democratic vote, made president for eternity. □

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were “not appreciative of the efforts being made by the government of Maldives to resolve the difficulties at hand.”

The Maldivian government initially said it detained 185 people, but said Friday 78 people remained in custody. Maldivian pro-democracy sources in Colombo said those still in detention included seven parliamentarians.

“It is essential that maximum international pressure is applied to ensure these innocent people’s release,” the EU parliamentarians said. “They are in grave danger, and represent the islands’ democratic future.”

Gayoom had signed “all sorts of international agreements”, including one banning torture, and has flouted every one of them,” the statement added.

EU envoys had said the imposition of emergency rule and mass arrests appeared to be disproportionate to what was a largely peaceful pro-democracy demonstration last month and called for its immediate repeal.

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Is Assassination Next?

Gayoom has taken care of the home front very well. Almost all who resist his brutal and corrupt regime are safely in custody – either through the tested and proven method of torture or (as in the case of those with businesses) through the fear of confiscation of property. Gayoom is quietly confident of keeping his hostages under control. Perhaps, in the process, give a further boost to the family business by confiscating (and retaining for family use) Gasim’s assets. This is not too difficult an

act for Gayoom – all he has to do is tell his judges to find Gasim guilty of high treason or confiscate the property on grounds of national security. No excuses asked, none given.

With the hostages secured, all that stands between him and assured continuity of his brutal oppression, are just five people in exile. So Gayoom has declared in an interview with the Hindu of India. It has been some months since the talk of assassinating key people opposed to his dictatorial rule has been bandied around. If pro-Gayoom hate websites (controlled, reportedly by Gayoom’s two sons, his Executive Secretary Shahid, brother Yameen and the NSS) are anything to go by, the process seems to have reactivated in earnest. Intimate details about the dissidents in Sri Lanka, including the whereabouts and movements, are known to Gayoom’s people and assassination seems imminent. Two questions come to mind: (a) Will assassinating a few (or even all five) of the dissidents help Gayoom to continue with his brutal rule forever? (b) Presumably the potential targets would

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Gayoom's EU Blues

Gayoom is not amused by EU. In fact he is quite cross. According to pro-Gayoom hate websites run by his sons, extended family and the NSS (an excellent source of insight to Gayoom's mindset) EU is on Gayoom's hate list - almost on par with such stalwarts as Amnesty International. Since he is more scared of the EU than AI (who cannot impose sanctions on him) he shows more official restraint when dealing with EU. However, Gayoom's government has basically called the EU Heads of Mission, liars. According to Gayoom's Foreign Ministry mouthpiece, the government takes "strong exception to the statement that the EU delegation was not granted access to the detained members of the Special Majlis." Either the EU Heads of Mission is lying or Gayoom is lying. If past record is anything to go by, Gayoom, an inveterate liar, would seem the culprit. Besides it is difficult to imagine that EU has too much to gain by lying about a matter that is, from their point of view, not quite of earthshaking importance. Heads of Mission of EU are not widely known to lie about who they get to meet or do not get to meet. Besides, just as in the case of AI and ICRC, EU - one may be reasonably confident - is not after Gayoom's sovereignty nor are they known to have imperial designs on Maldives. It is a bit like Gayoom's oft repeated lie that the pro-democracy activists are causing violent unrest in the country because they (and not those actually entrenched in power - Gayoom's family and cronies) have too much to lose when Gayoom takes the country to the promised land of rule of law, respect for human rights and dignity, absence of torture, an end to corruption and nepotism, separation of powers and a system of good governance based on transparency and accountability. Gayoom's lies are becoming so increasingly blatant and outrageous (and in many ways quite silly) that one may be forgiven for speculating on his state of mind.

Yes, Gayoom's lies are getting more outrageous by the day. Here are some comments on Gayoomspeak presented through his Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Some of it is quite hilarious:

The state of emergency has not affected the general population in any tangible manner but is effectively limited only to the suspension of certain rights of those detained.

The capital of Male, once a vibrant town, has at night, the eerie silence of a place that has just gone through a war. As intended by Gayoom fear now grips the people of Male. Suspension of certain rights including all the fundamental rights in the constitution is of course, of no "tangible" importance to Gayoom - in spite of the fact he has signed international conventions that specifically prohibit many of the draconian steps he and his NSS thugs indulged in.

The state of emergency is a preventive matter taken in the interest of public safety and national security in the face of threats of bombs and arson made by anonymous entities.

The State of Emergency is a stage managed act "taken in the interest" of keeping Gayoom, his family and cronies in power and in wealth. For Gayoom, "national security" is equivalent to "family security" of perpetual rule. Bombs are a figment of Gayoom's hyperactive mind while arson is arranged by younger brother Yameen as an excuse to keep dissidents in custody. Gayoom has, despite the bravado, not an iota of proof for his claims

The Government of Maldives wishes to highlight that "mass arrests" were not made in connection with the incident of August 12th and 13th and that only 78 people are being held in custody for investigations.

Hundreds were arbitrarily detained and openly tortured by Gayoom's NSS. In a population about 300,000 that number of detainees, for Gayoom, does not constitute mass arrest. We need to bear in mind that these are not mere detainees but are **hostages**.

The Government of Maldives desires to resume the sitting of Special Majlis as soon as it becomes possible.

It will "become possible" only when Gayoom decides that he can rig the process to his hearts desire. Eleven of the leading pro-democracy members are in jail, including Mr. Gasim Ibrahim who was tipped to become the Speaker of the Special Majlis. If voting is conducted as specified by the constitution, Gasim would be elected which, of course, is why he remains in jail. The members of the Special Majlis will remain in detention or will be sentenced because he needs the constitution molded to suit his purposes. He does not need reformist advocates to upset his grand design to perpetuate his brand of feudalism

The government of Maldives is determined to press with the reform proposals articulated by the President.

So determined is the President that most of the pro-democracy activists (or people who dare oppose his despotic family rule) are in jail.

There is strong resistance by Islamic extremists to the introduction of reforms which they claim would be demeaning to Islamic injunctions and values.

Gayoom is the Patron Saint of Wahhabism in Maldives. Despotic as previous rulers may have been, no Maldivian ruler has used Islam as cynically as has Gayoom. All the Saudi-funded Madhrasas were built under Gayoom. His close friend, Minister Zahir Hussein, is the Maldivian head for "Call of Islam". Many of his closest advisors - including the head of the Supreme Council of Islam - are Saudi trained Wahhabis turned Gayoomis.

The only time Gayoom went to jail was for airing his views against the sale of alcohol in resorts. His earlier legitimacy in fact came from his portrayal of himself as a pious Islamic scholar. It is not Sheik Fareed but Gayoom himself, currently setting himself as the champion of women, who ensured that a woman cannot be head of an Islamic state. Some may believe that Gayoom does not believe in any God (other than himself that is) but most know that Gayoom's main tool of oppression is through the abuse of Islam.

A few weeks back one of his Wahhabi trained apologists spread a fatwa (over the state television) that the people must obey and not go against their God-given ruler even if the ruler is guilty of wrongdoing. It is not reform that demeans Islam but the cynical abuse of Islam to claw onto power at all costs that is "demeaning to Islamic injunctions and values."

Among the people who were arrested by the government, none of them is a "reformist leader" who has put forward any proposals on reform.

When the reformists who are now in jail tried to "put forward" their reform proposals, they were prevented from doing so in violation of their constitutional right to freedom of assembly and expression. Now they are in jail and Gayoom will ensure that the only "reform" that will come out would be to perpetuate his cruel and corrupt rule. Not too many people with any sense would believe that a cruel, violent despot who has ruled for 26 years over a country he believes is his (and family's) personal property, would give up his property voluntarily for an abstract concept of reform. Concepts of good governance - rule of law, transparency, accountability, answerability - are not, most would agree, compatible with Gayoom's violent, despotic kleptocracy.

The Government of Maldives has assured the EU Delegation that the Government is studying the MOU with the ICRC carefully with the intention of concluding the MOU at a future date.

Gayoom loves to give "future dates" for reforms. Definite, time-bound reform agendas cramp his free and loose style of "reform". Everything the international

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