

Police State with a Human Face

In a recent article in the local daily Haveeru, writer Ahmed Hamdhoon compares the difference between police actions under previous administrations and the current one, and attempts to convey the notion that Police actions have grown milder, and given us more freedom to exercise our civil liberties. It is indeed true that Maldives Police Services have been trying to put a "human face" on the establishment. Protests have been allowed to carry on after 12am. Protesters are free to protest in most zones (excluding the Security Zone/Green Zone). Commissioner Abdulla Riyaz regularly holds press conferences and debriefs news media on developments. He has attempted to justify his use of high-pressured water cannons as "the least harmful" way to disperse gatherings - referring to its use in the recent women's protest. He goes even as far as interacting almost daily on twitter, and appears very accessible to the public.

Indeed, this show of force was exactly what was demonstrated on 8 February 2012. When thousands of MDP supporters came out on the streets of Malé, in reaction to the coup d'état, the police reacted with utter brutality and breached all police rules and

regulations related to the breakup of protests. The horrifying viciousness of their reaction can be witnessed on numerous videos that have since surfaced and available on social websites such as YouTube. In extremely clear and graphic video footage, police officers can be seen beating protesters while they are lying on the street and beating protest-

should be brought to justice, yet is given protection as privileges gained for their part in the coup d'état. After all, prosecution of identifiable police officers recorded on video (especially on the 8th of February and later dates in Addu - a wholly different incident) need not wait for the outcome of any independent investigations related to the coup d'état. This project of humanizing this brutal police force is an attempt to mute our calls for justice and the issue of police violence is buried under other seemingly more urgent matters - like the opening of parliament. Complicit in this strategy to gloss over illegal and inhuman police brutality, through negligence and willful ignorance, are civil society actors - Maldives Human Rights Commission, Police Integrity Commission, and prominent NGOs - that have remained silent in the face of extreme violence. The negligence of Police Integrity Commission in this matter is highly reprehensible and goes far to show the extent of influence, in state institutions, of the old autocratic

shown complete contempt for the constitution and laws of this country and clearly explains why the police carried out a mutiny without any hesitation or fear of consequences.

We will not have "Rule of Law" unless our institutions, that have the responsibility to scrutinize police, functions well and act independently. However, those institutions have been hijacked and broken, which enables this regime to retain this extra-legal police force. It is conclusive that the political goal of this regime is to retain this large extra-legal police force with extra-legal powers, to use them willfully at their discretion for any necessary purposes. There is only one name that should be used for states with such forces - A Police State.

Dismantling of this Police State can only begin with an election that returns sovereignty to the people.

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The naive response would be to say that the police have grown milder in the face of enormous resistance by MDP protesters and the sheer numbers that police would have to confront. There is some to the that if were a

truth fact, there massive confrontation it would be costly to both sides, and there is value in avoiding, avoidable confrontations. Nevertheless, let us be under no such illusions. The combined forces of both Police and MNDF (Maldives National Defense Force), with the use of tear-gas, pepper spray, batons, water cannons and rubber bullets, as well as by using legal loop holes to arrest key protest leaders, would be sufficient to quell any such protest. The current regime is adamant on staying in power, using all available means, and they will not hesitate to use extreme force if the need arises.

ers over the head repeatedly with batons. Consequently, in the following days, anecdotal evidence of far greater brutality have emerged from Addu Atoll, where media was not present to witness the event, which is now being reported by Amnesty International.

Thus, we can conclude that this "humanizing" of recent police activities is part of a different strategic agenda, not in any way a programme of addressing concrete issues with the police force. One can conjecture here that this PR strategy allows the current regime in avoiding or delaying confrontation with the real issue - a mutinous police force who acted outside the law, who

Section 11(b) iii. of the Police Act gives legal authority and necessary powers to the Police Integrity Commission "to minimize and bring to an end corruption, excessive use of force and other offences by the police in carrying out their duties and functions". Yet, police actions have never been properly scrutinized in this country, with Police Integrity Commission sleeping at the wheel. That is one reason why the police have



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since the coup. call for immediate elections!

15th March 2012 International Day against Police Brutality

