



A change in the Maldives

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Highlights

- When most had assumed that a second term for Maldivian President Abdulla Yameen was a done deal, given the controlled nature of the Maldivian elections, the people of the small archipelago in the Indian Ocean voted for change and brought to power the Opposition candidate, Ibrahim Mohamed Solih.
- They came out in huge numbers with the turnout being 89.2% and dealt a decisive blow to Mr. Yameen.

Democratic vote

- Belying concerns that he may not respect the outcome, after a few hours of election results, Mr. Yameen conceded defeat in a televised address by saying: "The Maldivian people have decided what they want. I have accepted the results."
- Mr. Solih is a senior politician in the Maldives and was the joint presidential candidate for an opposition alliance of the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), the Jumhooree Party and the Adhaalath Party.
- His victory underscores the commitment of the Maldivian politicians to secure the future of democracy in their country.
- This was a do or die battle for democrats and they succeeded.
- The U.S. State Department said the Maldivian people had "raised their democratic voices to determine the future of their country."
- The Maldives has been in turmoil since its first democratically-elected leader, Mr. Nasheed, was forced out of office following a police mutiny in 2012.

Tilt towards China

- The alacrity with which Mr. Yameen embraced China caught India off guard.
- During his China visit last year, the two nations signed 12 pacts, including a free trade agreement (FTA). Mr. Yameen not only fully endorsed China's ambitious Maritime Silk Road initiative but also made the Maldives the second country in South Asia, after Pakistan, to enter into an FTA with China.
- The massive infrastructure growth funded by Chinese debt was a key part of Mr. Yameen's election campaign but the massive debt trap made it a difficult proposition to be accepted.
- Democratic institutions have been weakened and a fragile democracy can also be susceptible to radical ideologies if not effectively governed.
- And China is not going anywhere in a hurry. Its economic presence in the Maldives is a reality that all governments will have to contend with.
- If there is one lesson out of the Maldives crisis, it is that political elites in India's

neighbours will come and go but if India can stand together with the aspirations of citizens of neighbouring countries, then the prospects of a long-term sustainable relationship will be much brighter.

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