

Maldives polls body fines opposition over UN logo use

Electoral body fined main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) and its ally Adhaalath Party Monday over events it had flagged as unlawful during a recent anti-government protest.

In a statement, Elections Commission said each party is required to pay MVR75,000 within a week. The fine was given due to the use of the logo of the United Nations by protestors and allowing children to take part in the demonstration, it added.

According to the commission, police were consulted before taking its decision.

MDP hit back at the Elections Commission on Monday, accusing it of discrimination when penalising political parties.

Elections Commission warned MDP last week after the UN logo was used in some banners during the anti-government protest in capital Male on November 27.

The commission had also asked MDP to not allow children into protests.

In response, MDP insisted that that party had not encouraged the participation of children and noted that the party was being penalised over the actions of individual protestors.

If the commission penalises parties for actions of individual members, then the commission must take action against the ruling party over president Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom's decision to snub the UN panel ruling urging the government to release jailed former president Mohamed Nasheed, MDP said.

MDP began using the UN logo following the ruling in late September by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention that Nasheed's imprisonment was arbitrary.

Nasheed was sentenced to 13 years in prison in March after he was convicted of the arbitrary detention of Chief Criminal Judge Abdulla Mohamed while he was president.

The former president was transferred to house arrest in July due to health reasons but late August he was taken back to prison. The opposition accused the government of backtracking on its decision to commute the ex-president's sentence.

The government has faced mounting international pressure to release Nasheed whose incarceration has been ruled as illegal by a UN panel.

Human Rights Commission of Maldives (HRCM) had also criticised opposition supporters who participated in the extended protest for bringing along children to the demonstration.