

# Newsletter

*Maldivian Democratic Party*

1 - 14 December 2003

## *Maldivian Democratic Party in Exile*

On different occasions Maumoon Abdul Gayyoom, the President of Maldives has unambiguously reiterated the fact that "Our laws do not bar anybody from forming a political party if they want to". Article 27 of the constitution of Maldives, enshrines freedom of association as a fundamental civil liberty of its citizens.

However, during a quarter century of increasingly repressive, authoritarian rule Gayoom has systematically thwarted every attempt by citizens to exercise this basic right. On 2001 members of parliament, a former cabinet minister, leading businessmen, academics, feminists and popular sports stars came together to form a political party, in the name of Maldivian Democratic Party. Their inquiries from the concerned authorities revealed that the registration would be merely an administrative formality.

**"Our laws do not bar anybody from forming a political party if they want to" President Gayoom.**

However, President Gayyoom determined otherwise. With blatant disregard of the constitution he refused to register the party. He further compounded his illegal act by getting his rubber stamp parliament to endorse his open defiance of the fundamental law of the country.

MDP, therefore, has no alternative but to exercise their fundamental right of freedom of association outside the Maldives. MDP will continue to try to persuade Gayyoom to grant the party legal status as defined by the constitution and the laws of the country. In the meantime, the party will work towards achieving its goals and ideals using every legal means at its disposal. We invite the people of Maldives to join our struggle to bring back to our citizens the basic civil liberties that Gayyoom has deprived us for a quarter century.

### **MDP Chronology**

28<sup>th</sup> February 2001 : Papers submitted to the Home Minister by the group of 42 eminent persons, requesting the registration of the Maldivian Democratic Party in accordance with the laws and regulations of the country.

5<sup>th</sup> April 2001 : The Home Ministry responded by assuring that an answer will be given after the Ministry investigates to the matter.

3<sup>rd</sup> May 2001 : First meeting with the Home Ministry. The meeting was chaired by the Minister of Home Affairs and Housing Hon. Ismail Shafeeu and accompanying him from the Ministry were Deputy Director Mr. Muiz Adnaan and Secretary Mr. Abbas Mohamed. MDP was represented by Mr. Mohamed Nasheed (MP) Mr. Ilyas Hussain, Dr. Fathin Hameed and Cpt. Abdulla Saeed. MDP requested from the Ministry to brief them of their request to grant them permission for political association. MDP further

wanted to know if there were any other matters that the Ministry might want to clarify from MDP. The Minister responded by stating that all matters directly relating to the party has been covered but as the government was further clarifying legal issues relating to the registration of a political party, a final decision was pending.

While the Government was engaged in such delay tactics the government controlled media embarked on a campaign to slander those seeking political association.

21<sup>st</sup> May 2001 : the second meeting between the Home Ministry and MDP. In the meeting while the Ministry was represented by the same delegates as before, MDP was represented by, Mr. Mohamed Nasheed (MP), Mr. Ibrahim Ismail, Dr. Fathin Hameed, Mr. Ilyas Hussain, Mr. Mohamed Ziyad and Cpt. Abdulla Saeed. Mr. Muhamed Zuhair worked as the MDP secretary. The Minister of Housing and Home Affairs neglected his constitutional

obligations and referred the matter to the President's Office. The President in turn suspended his obligations as the Chief Executive and referred the matter to the Peoples Majlis.

Referring the request of the 42 people for political association, to the Majlis does nothing to legitimize the denial of the request for political association. Subjugation of the Majlis by vote rigging and intimidation of its members remains a consistent feature of the present regime. Furthermore majority of the members of the Majlis are mostly just hand-picked associates of the regime that have gone through the pretence of an election.

Hence, a leading group of the initial 42, investigated other possibilities for political association as a Party. Having decided that the only viable option for such association was by declaring the Party as an entity in exile, on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2003 the Maldivian Democratic Party was formally declared.

***The Party will conduct it's first election during early 2004 and it will be held through the world wide web***

# MDP is resolved to live.

The international community no longer believes Gayoom as the legitimate ruler of the country

The rules of procedure (written originally in Dhivehi) submitted to the Ministry of Home Affairs, at the time of the request for registration of MDP in 2001, clearly reveals that the basic objective of the party was to introduce fundamental political and civil rights in Maldives.

While the constitution of Maldives already enshrines these fundamental rights, Gayyoom's regime has steadfastly refused the citizens the right to exercise them.

Given Gayyoom's continued refusal, MDP has no option but to exercise their rights in exile. The party is determined to do so without fear, even if, it means subject to prosecution.

MDP is in contact with the international community to seek assistance and support from different countries and organizations committed to the ideals of democracy and civil liberty. In this regard we believe that the party has been extremely successful. The international community no longer believes Gayoom as the legitimate ruler of the country. They have taken notice of the fact that elections in the Maldives are, as a routine, manipulated - especially in the islands. The parliament of the Maldives only exists in name and there is no freedom of speech. The most basic human rights of the citizens are regularly violated. The international community has also come to understand that MDP is a viable entity that could win a free and fair election and function as an alternative government. The international community is particularly satisfied by the principles and philosophy of MDP in that they accommodate pluralism, rule of law, respect for human rights, freedom of speech, collective bargaining, and issues of good governance.

The international community has further taken into account MDP's stand against all forms of fundamentalism and extremism.

Given these facts, we are now in a very promising position to carry out our mandate. We shall continue to struggle and achieve our objectives of realising a more free and democratic Maldives.

We shall prevail.

Please mail feedback to:  
secretariat@maldiviandemocraticparty.org

On 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2003, an interview with the Maldivian president's wife, was televised by Maharaja Television in Sri-Lanka. Nasreena Ibrahim was interviewed by Miss. Frederica Jansz from the Sunday Leader. Among other things the wife of the president attempted to justify the denial of political association to the people.

Frederica :.. One of your former members of parliament, Mr. Mohamed Latheef, I think he has gone public, he has given a public interview challenging your husband's re-election to office, and he says that he is trying to establish another political party, the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP). But he has not been allowed to do this in the Maldives. He has been prevented from doing so, that they are not allowed to form an opposition, they are not allowed to voice any dissent against Mr. Gayoom's rule. ..How do you respond to this.

Nasreena : I'm not involved in this, I think my husband was very open for multiparty system. I mean as a person, I know that he is, but parliament voted against it. I think that was in 1999.

Frederica: Why?

Nasreena: Because many people felt that, a lot of people felt that there was, we would not be achieving anything, we are all working for towards the same goal. Just by forming a party, may be they felt that would not be serving the country in any way.

Frederica: Perhaps you are feeling that an opposition party would cause disharmony.

Nasreena: I'm not sure. This is what was passed by law, that they do not want to have a party system here, they felt that what is existing is working for them.

## Amnesty International

*The Republic of Maldives Prisoners of conscience should be released*  
19 November 2003, AI Index: ASA 29/005/2003

Despite mounting concern worldwide and within the country, the Government of Maldives has not released any of the prisoners of conscience which it has kept in detention for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression

These prisoners include **Fathimath Nisreen** who remains detained since February 2002 on accusation that she worked for the production of a clandestine internet e-mail magazine critical of the government. She was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment after a grossly unfair trial in July 2002 and was until recently held in detention in Mafushi prison, 18 miles south of the capital, Malé. In addition, she was reportedly sentenced to be banished for one year on charges of defaming the president.

On 13 November, Fathimath Nisreen was transferred from prison to house arrest in preparation for the government's plans to banish her to a remote island. House arrest is a practice used by the Government of Maldives in which a prisoner's own house is turned into his/her detention centre with severe

restrictions imposed on family visits and access to the outside world.

Banishment is a form of punishment in the Maldives whereby the prisoner is sent to live on a remote island with the local inhabitants. It is then left to the prisoner to earn money - usually through hard labour - to top up the meagre daily allowance given to him or her by prison authorities. This allowance is a very small amount of money hardly sufficient for one meal a day. Prisoners who cannot find work have to rely on the financial support of their relatives for subsistence. Women banished suffer most as they become easy targets for harassment and sexual abuse by the village men.

Amnesty International is urging the Government of Maldives to release Fathimath Nisreen and other prisoners of conscience immediately and unconditionally. They should not be held in any form of detention whether in prison facilities, under house arrest or banished to a remote island

Another prisoner of conscience, **Jennifer Latheef**, has been held in detention since 22 September 2003 following unprecedented civil protests in Malé a few days earlier. The protests were sparked off when a prisoner was beaten to death by the National Security Service (NSS) personnel and, later, other prison inmates who were protesting his death were shot at by the NSS resulting in several



