

Gayoomspeak on BBC — by *The Maldivian*

I listened to Gayoom’s 23rd August BBC interview with absolute awe. I just could not believe that a person – leave alone the President of a country – could lie so blatantly. Surely he must know that neither the Maldivians nor the rest of the world are so absolutely gullible, so unaware that they would actually believe him. Despite his discomfort and body language, I got the distinct feeling that he actually does believe some of his own lies. Here are some quick points I noted. I would be grateful if you could print it in the newsletter,

Gayoomspeak: *There is no crackdown,*

- Around 200 (by government account, God knows the actual figure) protestors were dragged from their homes, dragged by their beards from mosques, dragged on the road, thrown into armored cars, verbally and physically abused and locked-up. Whilst in detention, most were handcuffed or tied with a cable, hooded and systematically beaten. Some had to undergo intensive care. “There is no crackdown” says the Great Dictator. Would it take the torture of the entire population of the country for Gayoom to call his brutality a crackdown?

Gayoomspeak: *Some people are not happy because they thought they may lose their power, their positions.*

- The above statement is clear, irrevocable proof that Gayoom is capable of an occasional truth. The people “not happy” about losing “their power, their position” are, one can reasonably assume, those already enjoying such power and position – Gayoom, his family and cronies who have a monopoly on power and position under Gayoom’s dictatorship.

Gayoomspeak: *We have to find the appropriate time for any change.*

- Give me time; give me time in Gayoom’s mantra, his knee-jerk reaction to change. The “appropriate time” for Gayoom never comes. 26 years is proof of it.

Gayoomspeak: *We have been changing things for the past 25 years.*

- Bravo Gayoom! Yet another truth! Gayoom indeed has been changing – for the worse. Gayoom has changed the Maldives from a run-of-the-mill repressive state to arguably (yes

North Korea is always a running contender) the most undemocratic, repressive police state on the face of earth. From a corrupt few (corruption among the government servants and the judiciary was almost unheard of under Nasir) Gayoom has made Maldives a frontline contender for the most corrupt country in the world. In the process his family has changed from a poor middle class family to one that is stinking rich with assets both in the country and in different parts of the world. Oh no! things are changing under good old Maggy.

Gayoomspeak: *Reforms that I have already presented to the public on the 9th June, represents a radical departure from what we have seen as in the past 25 years.*

- Indeed. “Presenting” reform is what Gayoom is good at. He sincerely believes that talk of such “radical” reform should be good enough for his subjects and should keep the international community happy and content. Now with Emergency Rule in place and many of the Majlis members who will “derail” his reform to safeguard “their power, their position” safely under lock and key our hero can rest on his promises of “radical change”. Now we know that Moses rejected Pharaoh’s “substantial reform agenda” and created unrest among the people just to hold on to his “power and position”. Gayoom makes so much sense.

Gayoomspeak: *Nobody is above the law.*

- Heh! heh! heh! That is quite hilarious. Sorry, I forgot. Gayoom is the law. Nobody is above the law. Way to go Maggy Boy! Yet another truth!

Gayoomspeak: (Responding to the suggestion that some detainees have been punched and beaten up) *I don’t think that’s true.*

- Gayoom does “not think that’s true”. He **knows** it’s true. The Kaaminee Militia and Gayoom’s NSS went on a rampage of violence with a clearly targeted objective of instilling fear among the people. The beating at the time of arrest was brutal, open and pervasive while the torture and beating while in custody was systematic and was aimed at celebrating the return to open police rule and (primarily) as a “softening” tactic to extract

“confessions” of Gayoom’s choice. If Gayoom is unaware of the beatings, he is in the unique position of being perhaps the only adult Maldivian in such blissful ignorance. Was Pol Pot aware that, perhaps, a few died under his rule? Was Hitler aware that a few Jews here and there may have suffered some discomfort under his rule? Will Gayoom ever be aware that his NSS systematically brutalizes his people? The answer is a categorical yes. He is aware because, according to the Police Commissioner Adam Zahir, Gayoom himself directed some of the tortures against political detainees in the past.

Gayoomspeak: *Violence, Violence. They stabbed two unarmed policeman, they set fire to a major government building and they wanted to assault the police headquarters.*

- The “they” in Gayoom refers to mostly his brother Yameen’s private militia (working in concert with the NSS) who tried hard to provoke a peaceful gathering to acts of violence to give him an excuse to unleash his violence. The stone throwing and the cracked window was an act committed by Yameen’s thugs as was the orchestrated burning of an unhinged door at “a major government building” which the fire brigade doused after the necessary photographs and videos were taken. No one “assaulted” the police headquarters. The knifing was an act of vengeance perpetrated by a prisoner who was tortured by the NSS – he was hung upside down in a well. Gayoom is, once again reasonably truthful: there was some violence perpetrated by his brother’s militia - accompanied by a huge dose of excessive indulgence by his NSS. Violence. Violence, Violence. That, Gayoom seems to think, is the only way for him to rule over the peaceful, homogenous, but very unfortunate people of Maldives.

Gayoomspeak: *This is no frustration built up over the years.... I have been elected for the sixth term as President with over 90 percent of the popular vote.*

- Gayoom’s capacity for self-delusion knows no bounds. He sees crowds of frustrated people in a number never before experienced in the Maldives, he then calls for pro-democracy

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activists to help calm them, after which he beats the crowds in their hundreds and pretends, (like all dictators of his ilk do), that "there is no frustration". Who are his goon squads tear-gassing and baton charging? Ghosts?

Yes the results cooked by his brother Hameed closely shows how the dictator got 90%, but much less than the percentage his mentor Saddam did. One wonders how much Pol Pot or Hitler would have got. Many were surprised that he did not get over 100%.

Gayoomspeak: *I want to have a multi party democratic system.*

· Heh! heh! heh! Pleas do not expect me to comment on obscenities.

Gayoomspeak: (Answering the question, what is stopping him from having a multi party democratic system) *The derailment of the process of the mob.*

· Ha! That explains all. The "derailment of reforms" by a mob consisting of a few, "there is no frustration" people has stopped our hero's effort at democracy and participatory politics. Gayoom is so full of truth that even a child could understand the logic of his sincerity. He had such a "substantial reform agenda" all of which have to be sidelined because of the work of a mob. So sad. Now poor Gayoom has to reluctantly go back to his constitution of total dictatorial rule. He will be forced, against his will, to be the executive, legislative and judiciary power of Maldives. Of course, the Commander in Chef and the Head Mullah, the Minister of Defense and the Minister of Finance as well. These trying times are really hard for dictators. Even the Proclamation of Emergency is not much consolation for a man so cruelly derailed from filling his "substantial reform agenda". Well lets us hope that after another 26 years of reluctant, absolute rule no mob comes along to disturb his "substantial reform agenda". Bye bye, so long, farewell, auf wiedershen, reform. You were never meant to be.

Gayoomspeak: *I have to send my proposal to the Majlis and they will have to endorse those proposals for them to become a part of the constitution. I can't do it on my own. This is a democratic country; the Majlis will have to decide.*

· This man seems incapable of getting into his head that amending the constitution is the work of a constituent assembly gathered for that specific purpose. The constitution does not say he has "to send my proposals to the Majlis and they will have to endorse it." Please Mr. Gayoom, the People's Special Majlis is not a rubber stamping device that "will have to endorse these proposals" of yours. According to the constitution the Majlis members can, among themselves, come up with proposals and amendments. That, Mr. Gayoom, is what their duty is all about and not "endorsing" your pre-packaged constitution. Of course you are quite right in assuming that, perhaps 17 years later, your "perfect" constitution will be endorsed without a comma out of place. And, Mr. Gayoom, please stick to your earlier label of the country as a "unique" democracy like your mentor Saddam's Iraq. Calling a country ruled by an absolute despot on whom all executive, legislative, judicial, economic and administrative power is concentrated a democracy would be a gross lie - even by your admittedly high standards. Gayoom is an anachronism. In the dark ages he would have been considered reasonably democratic.

Gayoomspeak: *I am not all too powerful. I am not above the law; I have to respect the law.*

· Gayoom (aka the Law of Maldives) is not above himself and he has to respect himself "Gayoom" and "law" are synonyms. He is not "all too powerful" - God is still a serious contender.

Gayoomspeak: (Responding to the charge that he was "bundling the entire opposition into jail") *No, I don't think so.*

· True, Gayoom has a few opponents out of Male' and he has not yet been able to identify all his opponents. But, like he always says, give him time. He will have all his opponents in jail.

This is an essential prerequisite for his "substantial reform agenda."

Gayoomspeak: *Some of them did carry knives and sticks...they were unruly and they took to violence in the end.*

· A person earlier tortured by the NSS did carry a knife and stab a policeman. So why not take legal action against him. A bearded man (Sheik Fareed) preaching non-violence did point out Gayoom's excesses. If he has violated the law do take legal action. Yameen's thugs, working in tandem with the NSS, did try to cause violence. Why not take legal action (sorry I forgot- they are the "good" guys.)

Why not take legal action against those who violate laws and desist from going on a rampage of indiscriminate violence and brutality against those who do not - even if they do not agree with Gayoom's form of governance? Can Sheik Fareed's preaching, the act of a mentally disturbed drug addict and stone-throwing by Yameen's thugs be an excuse for the NSS's merciless crackdown of hundreds who were not involved in such acts? Why crackdown on 11 members of the constituent assembly? - Because they need to be in jail or (in the case of those living abroad) have them disposed of, for Gayoom to pass his "substantial reform agenda."? If there is a logic to all this, I am missing out.

Gayoom instigates the most horrendous crackdown in the history of Maldives and uses his thugery as a fig leaf to derail the insincere reform agenda he proposed under duress. For anyone to take him seriously Gayoom, at the very least, needs to set a time frame for his reform proposals and to establish an independent, effective mechanism to oversee, implement and monitor the process. All that is required is political will on the part of Gayoom. So far he has proved that political will is a trait he sorely lacks. □

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Letters

Gayoom the Congenital Liar

Gayoom's hate site operators (Executive Secretary Abdullah Shahid, Brother Yameen, Adam Zahir's NSS boys and Gayoom's family, son-in-law and children) are livid that he is getting a bashing from the international and regional media.

They are particularly incensed about Gogo's epithet to the Dictator expressed on BBC interview: a congenital liar. Truth hurts, I accept. I do not know how much of a liar Gayoom is in his private capacity. What I do know with certainty is, as a political figure, he surely must rank among the most prolific liars the world has seen. It may very well be that after 26 years of everyone "believing" whatever comes out of his mouth, Gayoom is convinced that whatever he speaks must necessarily be "truth". He may, though I seriously doubt it, well have spoken an occasional truth in his non-dictatorial early years. However, I fear, such days are long gone. Gayoom may well not be, I grant, a congenital liar. However, he is most certainly an inveterate, pathological, compulsive, unconscionable, habitual practitioner of verbal inexactitude. Let us call a spade a spade, shall we? - Even if cushioned to cause the least possible hurt to our Dictator. □

Have Mercy on Gayoom

I am seriously concerned about Sappe's abuse of our Great Dictator. Surely anyone with an iota of intelligence must, by now, know that our Great Leader is a mentally (if not physically) sick man and needs nurturing, loving care. Okay, the Great Dictator may have abused our fundamental rights and may even have assisted sending a few people to heaven (aka tortured to death in custody.) However one needs to understand that there are mitigating circumstances to his wanton cruelty. For one thing the poor man is simply not in control of his mental faculties. So would you be if only after a brief 26 years of peaceful absolute rule people start clamouring for such alien, unMaldivian concepts as freedom, democracy and fundamental rights. Surely his subjects should be happy that he talks about those alien, dirty subjects - even if under pressure from meddling "outsiders" who do not understand our peaceful, serene, law and order culture. If only the world had more Hitlers, Pol Pots and Saddams - all mentally challenged like our Beloved Dictator Gayoom - who would understand and appreciate the predicament of despots.

Any doubts about Gayoom's mental competence (or lack of it) would be dispelled if one bothers to watch Gayoom's 23rd August BBC interview. The facial expression, the nervous twitch, the body language would be sufficient proof of the man's diminished mental capacity. Hill and Knowlton, spin doctor Shaheed and Gayoom's family should not subject our Beloved Dictator to such torture, cruel and degrading treatment. □

Plans to assassinate dissidents

I am frankly impressed by the operators of pro-Gayoom websites. Their efforts to get details of dissidents are quite commendable. The site reportedly operated by President's Executive Secretary, Abdullah Shahid, for example, even carried details of Latheef's Sri Lankan ID, driving license and registration of his vehicle.

While such details could be useful in an assassination attempt, I fail to see the utility of publicizing them. The site seems quite open about discussing assassinations. Surely among the first assassination suspects would be Gayoom's close relatives and associates who operate them? According to talk in Male, Minister Yameen is in serious consultation with a Sri Lankan businessman residing in Male with connection to a separatist group in Sri Lanka.

I am not at all convinced that assassination of those opposed to Gayoom's form of governance would put an end to his political

woes. I would venture to add that the ensuing international media attention of an assassination may well cause the Gayoom regime more harm than good. Instead of resorting to such extreme means as political assassination, Gayoom's cause may be better served by actually going through the reform process he proposed.

My sincere recommendation to Gayoom and his brothers would be to curb the violent tendencies of their NSS and militia - especially if they want to perpetuate their family rule. Violence tends to breed violence and Gayoom's children and grandchildren will find Maldives even more difficult to rule. Already the nation of only about 300,000 people, the most homogenous on earth, is among the top ten spenders on defense as a percentage of the GDP. If violence is the only option Gayoom sees to maintain his family rule, Maldives will soon be competing for the top spot with North Korea. Is the Presidency worth all this? □

Gayoom Applies Lipstick

On 1st September Gayoom announced changes in his cabinet. Ambaree Abdul Sattar (Minister of State for Defense and National Security) has been kicked out of the cabinet and is now an ambassador for nowhere. Ismail Shafeeg who has acted as Gayoom's patsy in refusing the registration of MDP in 2001 is now rewarded with the more busy front as the Minister of Defense and National Security. Now, as he did with the non-registration of MDP, Gayoom can try to quietly distance himself from the on-going torture and detention of pro-democracy activists and members of the Special Majlis.

Gayoom has disappointed many who expected that his Head Torturer Police Commissioner would be rewarded with a Ministerial post for his supportive role in the NSS which, after all, staged an internally arranged military group. One would have expected he would have been appointed at least as deputy martial law administrator.

Poor Brigay was not even given the job of Minister of Home Affairs. Well there is still hope. Once the cops come under Home Affairs the Head Torturer can be quietly made Minister and the newly appointed patsy Umar Zahir can be booted out as an ambassador.

Mohamed Jaleel is now Minister of Finance. I wonder how long he would last if he questions, for example, Gayoom's order to pay out of the national coffer a few million dollars to bail out his son for a drunken driving death in London? Ask former State Minister for Finance Arif Hilmy. Beneath Gayoom's thin layer of lipstick is still Gayoom himself. Names can change but the monolithic institution of Gayoom will be impervious to any of his "substantial change". □

Brotherly Support

Gayoom should be grateful to his hard-line brothers: Firstly brother Yameen was instrumental in coordinating with Police Commissioner in stage-managing Gayoom's violence, violence, violence which was the excuse needed to crackdown on peaceful pro-democracy activists. He was also a great help in instilling the necessary fear of Gayoom in the minds of the people as the police and his militia rounded up their "enemies". Now the militia is helping in maintaining "order" during curfew.

Brother Hameed too is being very helpful. He is getting his Katheeb's and official beholden to him stage pro-democracy rallies in the atolls. However, at times he seems to fail quite badly. In thinadhoo we understand, the handful who participated were, mostly foreigners. Some heads are bound to roll. However, Hameed is now in a position to compensate for his lackluster performance. With most of the reformist members in jail he can intimidate the rest of the members to come up with "substantial" reforms advocated by brother Maumoon. The substantial reform is expected to ensure that the family of Gayoom will rule the country well into the rest of the century. □

Khaleej Times Online >> News >> THE WORLD
Britain criticises Maldives crackdown on protests - Khaleej Times
 (AP)

18 August 2004

MALE, Maldives - Britain has criticized a crackdown on pro-democracy protesters in Maldives while this island country's government has justified the action by saying the demonstrators were trying to topple President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom's regime.

"We are concerned by reports of attacks by the police on peaceful protesters in Male (the capital) last Friday, the subsequent declaration of a state of emergency, and large numbers of arrests, including of members of the Special Majlis," the British Foreign Office said in a statement.

The Majlis is the Maldives parliament.

"We look to the government of the Maldives to ensure that all those arrested are treated in accordance with local law and international norms," said the statement, issued Tuesday. "They should either be charged or released as soon as possible."

Nearly 200 people were arrested following Friday's protests, in which police fired tear gas to disperse about 3,000 people outside the police headquarters in Male. Dozens of protesters, who were demanding the release of political prisoners, were wounded.

Among those arrested were Mohamed Munavvar, a former attorney general, and Ibrahim Hussain Zaki, an ex-national development minister. Both were sacked in November.

"The mob had attempted to overthrow the democratically elected government in the Maldives," said a statement posted on Gayoom's official Web site Tuesday.

It said the protesters had "engaged in a frenzy of violence, and that the president had announced a state of emergency to restore law and order after security services worked with restraint for over 17 hours to peacefully disperse the mob through dialogue and discussion."

However, a spokesman for the opposition Maldivian Democratic Party denied the government's claims.

"There was no question of any mobs taking over ... It was a peaceful demonstration by people seeking their basic fundamental rights," said Mohamed Latheef in neighboring Sri Lanka, where he lives in exile. The party is banned in Maldives.

Latheef has accused security forces of torturing his daughter, who was arrested after the protests.

Meanwhile, eight people detained during the demonstrations have been released, Capt. Mohamed Sadiq, spokesman of the National Security Services, said Tuesday.

Gayoom has ruled Maldives - a nation of 278,000 people located 500 kilometers (300 miles) off the Indian coast - with an iron fist since 1978. He won an unprecedented sixth five-year term in a referendum in October □

200 arrested in Maldives crackdown - Gulf News

Male, Maldives: Maldives' government said today it was searching for more dissidents after a state of emergency was declared in response to a rare demonstration in the tightly controlled Islamic island nation.

Dozens of demonstrators were injured when police fired tear gas to disperse about 3,000 people gathered outside the police headquarters on Friday.

The protesters were demanding the release of political prisoners.

Following the violence, the government on Friday declared a state of emergency, saying fundamental rights of citizens would be suspended, and people would not be allowed to gather, demonstrate or express views critical of the government.

"Security forces have taken 200 people into custody," said Capt. Mohamed Sadiq, a spokesman for the National Security Services.

Among those arrested in the crackdown were Mohamed Munavvar, Maldives former attorney general and Ibrahim Hussain Zaki, the former national development minister.

Both were sacked by the president in November, a senior government official said on condition of anonymity.

It is widely believed that President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom fired the two because of their pro-reformist views.

Gayoom, Asia's longest-serving leader, has been in power since 1978, ruling the tiny Indian Ocean nation with an iron fist.

He won another five-year term in an Oct. 17 referendum, in which he was the only candidate.

Today, the streets were calm with some shops open for business, although the National Security Service continued to patrol the streets, and armored personnel carriers guarded the presidential palace.

Gayoom has promised democratic reform, apparently prompted by international pressure, anti-government riots in 2003, and allegations that prisoners are tortured. □

The Daily Star
 Editorial
Crackdown in the Maldives

Democracy's time has come
 The recent arrest of at least 185 pro-democracy activists in the Maldives including former senior members of the government is cause for great concern. According to an anti-government spokesman, the 185 people the government has admitted to detaining is merely the tip of the ice-berg, and hundreds more have been detained with many more in hiding to avoid arrest.

Among those arrested are former Attorney General Mohamed Munavvar, and, most significantly for Bangladesh and the rest of Saarc, ex-minister and former Secretary General of Saarc,

Ibrahim Hussain Zaki, both of whom were sacked from the government in November due to their pro-reformist leanings.

The Maldives has been ruled by President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom with an iron fist for the past twenty-six years, and it is not merely the lack of democracy which is the problem in this idyllic country, it is the lack of democratic forums for debate and the continued suppression of dissent and repression of dissidents that is most troubling.

The recent arrests come hard on the heels of the declaration of a state of emergency on Friday after police had to fire tear gas to disperse about 3,000 people who had gathered to demand the release of political prisoners and the sacking of hard-line members of the cabinet.

Demonstrations in the Maldives are rare, and the fact that this latest one is considered so threatening by the government and has been joined by former senior members of the government indicates that perhaps now public opposition to the *status quo* and desire for democracy has reached a critical mass. It is high time that the Maldives government accepts that the democratic inclinations of its people cannot be contained indefinitely.

It is true that the Maldives is not the only Saarc country that is not a democracy, and that Saarc has hitherto kept itself detached from the domestic affairs of its member states. However, when it is the basic human rights of the people that are being denied and repressive means are used to maintain autocratic rule, as is the case here, we urge President Gayoom to have more respect for the rights and sensibilities of his people as a well-wisher of the Maldives and a co-traveller in Saarc. □

Indian Express - Aug 23 2004

Male sends messenger to 'clarify'

Gayoom's envoy to arrive today, Delhi will be friendly, firm

 JYOTI MALHOTRA

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 23: Unnerved by the unusual international interest in the state of emergency he clamped on his nation 10 days ago, Asia's longest-serving dictator and president of the Maldives Abdul Gayoom is sending a special envoy to New Delhi tomorrow.

Maldivian Health Minister Ahmed Abdullah arrives from Sri Lanka, where he has been briefing Colombo's leadership about the situation back home, bearing a letter for Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

While it isn't clear if he will get a meeting or not with the Prime Minister, Abdullah will meet External Affairs minister K Natwar Singh and present Gayoom's "point of view" to New Delhi. Abdullah's visit to India is taking on the character of a "make or break mission," considering the weight New Delhi can pull in the region. Gayoom is well aware that it was an Indian intervention in November 1988, under the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi, who sent him 1500 troops to battle Sri Lanka-based "terrorists" seeking to overthrow his dictatorship, that has kept him in power for 16 of the last 26 years.

Interestingly, Gayoom's arch-rival, the banned Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) has sent its spokesperson Mohammed Latheef to the capital to participate in a SAARC economic conference late last week.

Latheef, who was thrown out of Male last September along with a handful of Maldivians who sought to set up an alternative political party, met former PM I K Gujral and other senior ex-diplomats during his stay in the capital.

While New Delhi will certainly give Abdullah a patient hearing, it is more than a little concerned about the fate of former SAARC secretary-general and "friend of India" Ibrahim Hussain Zaki, who along with six other parliamentarians have been detained under the state of emergency imposed by Gayoom on August 13.

Certainly, Abdullah is not likely to repeat in New Delhi what many people in Gayoom's establishment have openly stated in Maldives Parliament or 'Majlis', that India has a "messy democracy" and that experiment cannot be replicated back home. While India may not be willing to be seen pushing Gayoom to the wall, as a EU "fact-finding mission" that reached Male on Sunday intends to do, it is concerned about the "lack of democracy" that is the case in Male. □

India chooses to wait and watch Gayoom's moves

JYOTI MALHOTRA

Posted online: Thursday, August 26, 2004 at 0151 hours IST

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 25: India will wait and watch how soon Maldivian President Abdul Gayoom pursues a truly democratic reform agenda in his country, the first test of which would be a special session of Parliament or Majlis under secret ballot. Maldivian Health minister Ahmed Abdullah, who is in Delhi as Gayoom's "special envoy" after the imposition of emergency in the island, met External Affairs minister K. Natwar Singh and handed over a letter from Gayoom to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. By all accounts, New Delhi treated Abdullah gently but firmly, pressing him to see that besides the reforms agenda, those arrested after the imposition of emergency, including former SAARC secretary-general Ibrahim Hussain Zaki, should be given "fair and humane treatment" in detention. Gayoom, clearly, seems to have won some sort of reprieve from New Delhi, at least for the now, and goes on to Pakistan from here. Abdullah seemed visibly relieved when he met journalists this evening and told them that "India was happy that the situation had returned to normal in the Maldives." Abdullah accepted that Zaki and other parliamentarians who had been in detention since August 13, had neither been charged nor tried, but couldn't say why. Neither could he answer why such prominent Maldivians had been picked up in the first place, as they were not part of the mob that "sought to violently derail and undermine the constitutional reform" that Gayoom had sought to introduce. He said he was glad to receive "India's support and understanding as a special friend of the Maldives." New Delhi underplayed its own reaction, its tongue firmly in cheek. "As a nation with strong deep-rooted democratic traditions and values, India is keenly observing the initiatives taken by the Maldives to usher in democratic and constitutional reforms. We support the democratization process and hope that it would be taken to its rightful conclusion," a MEA spokesperson said. Clearly, New Delhi was not keen on embarrassing Abdullah, but neither does it want to give Gayoom the impression that he can take New Delhi's support for granted. The government is keeping a keen watch on developments in the island country, including a trip the Maldivian dictator is believed to be planing to China by the month-end. □

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The Island
Thursday 26th August, 2004

Maldives: Fundamentalist bogey won't work

The claim of Maldivian health Minister Ahamed Abdullah, the Special Representative of President Abdul Gayoom that those who demonstrated in Male' on August 12 and 13 were "fundamentalists" who wanted to overthrow the democratically elected government of the Maldives will not be believed by foreigners interested in events in the Maldives and certainly not the Maldivian themselves. Those "fundamentalists" whom the Gayoom regime arrested and are still being held comprise mostly elite of this little nation. They include one of the best known Maldivian diplomats and former minister Ibrahim Zakee who also held the post of Secretary General of SAARC, Attorney General Dr. Mohamed Munavvar and seven members of the Majlis (Maldivian Parliament). According to informed sources, the demonstrations, which the government said, were violent infect were peaceful and some of the acts of violence such as attempted arson were the work of the government itself.

Just as much in the Cold War days, potty dictators of third world countries raised the bogey of communism or CIA conspiracies when impoverished and suppressed masses rose to overthrow them, "fundamentalists" appear to be the bogey of dictators of today with angry mobs at their place gates. Certainly there may be a few fundamentalists who see opportunities in the disturbed situation in Male but to throw the country's professionals into jail and torture them is to invite fundamentalism into the archipelago.

If President Gayoom thought he could curry favour with the Americans and western leaders by raising this bogey of fundamentalism, he has only kicked to his own goal. It is now quite apparent that countering fundamentalism will require enjoyment of fundamental rights of the people and the functioning of a vigorous, democratic pluralistic society rather than a one-man dictatorship, which President Gayoom imposed on the people for 26 years.

While President Gayoom can be credited for building up a strong economy with a booming tourist industry, it is a fact that the majority of the Maldivians remain abjectly poor. Most of the Maldivians are living in atolls where basic living amenities are not available. Maldives has all along been plutocracy-governed by a few rich families. But as it often happens, with the establishment of a middle class and the spread of education the demand for basic human rights commences and that is what is happening in Male today.

President Gayoom has now either to give up power or turn a new leaf and introduce democratic reforms.

President Gayoom and his supporters must be finding it galling to have the "international community" breathing down their neck and telling them what to do. We Sri Lankans have been going through such a bitter experience for a long time. But that is the trend in this new international order. Poor nations if they do not manage their own affairs will find big brothers moving in and interfering in democratic affairs, not solely for altruistic reasons.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

>August 27, 2004

A Statement by the Asian Human Rights Commission Government of Maldives must end intolerable rights abuses Reports from the Maldives in recent weeks indicate increasingly disturbing use of authoritarian powers by its government intended to suppress popular calls for democratic reform. After protests on August 13, President Gayoom declared a state of emergency, and mass arrests by the security forces followed, including of members of the National Human Rights Commission, former senior government members and other people now labelled "fundamentalists" by the president. Reports indicate that

National Security Services personnel have tortured many of those detained, most severely, opposition party activists Mohamed Ziyad and Muad Zaki, the former of whom is understood to have been in intensive care since August 13, and to have been transferred to Singapore after his condition deteriorated.

President Gayoom has presided over a one-party state since 1978. Despite fundamental rights being guaranteed in the national constitution, the government has so far resisted popular aspirations for genuine expression of these rights, making mere pretences to the contrary after widespread public expressions for democratic reforms in 2003. Meanwhile, under the state of emergency, the president is empowered to suspend fundamental rights and laws "which in the opinion of the President impede the maintenance of national security and public order".

It is evident that these latest steps by the government of the Maldives are intended to obstruct developments in favour of greater independence to the judiciary, separate powers of the head of state and government, and limit terms for the presidency. Indeed, the government of the Maldives has for years used methods typical of authoritarian states throughout Asia intent upon stifling public efforts for change. Civil offences have been utilised to arrest and intimidate persons seeking to promote legitimate democratic change, such as Mr. Abdullah Shakir, a member of parliament arrested in July 2001 for signing a petition to the Minister of Home Affairs requesting permission to set up an opposition party. Similarly, in 2003, Mohamed Zaki, Ibrahim Luthfee and Ahmed Didi were given life sentences, while one Fathumath Nisreen was given 10 years for producing an email newsletter: they were charged with inciting violence and defamation. Earlier, Naushad Waheed, an artist, was sentenced to 15 years for informing Amnesty International about government abuses.

This intolerable state of affairs must be brought to an end. The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) calls upon the government of the Maldives to take immediate steps to correct the damage caused in recent weeks. It can begin by providing medical assistance and compensation to victims of violence and torture by the security forces, and by ordering thorough independent investigations into all cases of attacks on protestors and torture of detainees, with a view to prosecuting the perpetrators. Above all else, it must without delay lift all restrictive regulations and allow for an unrestrained public debate on constitutional and political reform, and unconditionally release those persons detained for voicing popular aspirations for democratic change. Finally, the AHRC notes with alarm that the government of the Maldives has declined to become a party to most international human rights treaties, and urges it to do so without further delay, in particular, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights [http://www.hrea.org/erc/Library/display.php?doc_idE1] and the Convention against Torture

[http://www.hrea.org/erc/Library/display.php?doc_id*9]. In fact, a demonstrated commitment to the material contents of these treaties by the government would be a first step towards the institutional reforms necessary for effective institutional protection of those rights at present guaranteed - but not respected-under the constitution.

The Asian Human Rights Commission is a regional non-governmental organisation monitoring and lobbying human rights issues in Asia. The Hong Kong-based group was founded in 1984.

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The Maldives: From Charybdis to Scylla?

The Shah left people a choice between Savak and the mullahs. And they chose the mullahs. When thinking about the fall of any dictatorship, one should have no illusions that the whole system comes to an end like a bad dream with the fall. The physical existence of the system does indeed cease. But its psychological and social results live on for years, and even survive in the form of subconsciously continued behaviour. A dictatorship that destroys the intelligentsia and culture leaves behind itself an empty, sour field on which the tree of thought won't grow quickly.

It is not always the best people who emerge from hiding, from the corners and cracks of that farmed-out field, but often those who have proven themselves strongest, not always those who will create new values but rather those whose thick skin and internal resilience have ensured their survival.

In such circumstances history begins to turn in a tragic, vicious circle from which it can sometimes take a whole epoch to break free." Ryszard Kapuscinski "Shah of Shahs"

There have been riots and troubles at other times in the history of Maldives, but never before has the unrest been so persistent and relentless. President Maumoon Abdul Gayyoom used to pride himself of having brought stability to the country during his long tenure. However, his latest measures have included meeting every sign of civil strife with increased repression. This vicious circle is heightening the instability of the island nation and is making the situation in Male' more volatile day by day.

Maumoon's recent behaviour is marked by a lack of decisiveness and consistency. One day he promises to initiate reforms, the next day he arrests pro-reformist people; meanwhile in the Maldivian media the charade that he enjoys unanimous popular support continues as usual: He is the strong man, he is in control.

However, in the light of his increased clumsiness, it is easy to view President Maumoon as indecisive, surrounded by cliques of advisers who on one side tell him to show no mercy and strike hard at his opponents, while others on the other side tell him to initiate dialogue and promote some limited reforms.

Maldivians both at home and abroad have triggered a protest movement that seems unstoppable. Some of the protesters are asking for freedom and democracy, but the most unanimous demand is that President Maumoon must step down.

Talking to Maldivian young people we noticed that almost none of them know what they really want after Maumoon is gone for good. In a situation that seems confusing and uncertain, the only ones who know what they want, and they know it very well, are the religious hard-liners. They are already taking positions, preparing for the time when the dictatorship will be over.

One can easily picture the day when the few true freedom and democracy lovers of Maldives will be overrun by the highly organized religious fanatics.

Maumoon fared well during the first years of his tenure; by playing both the role of the Ayatollah and the Shah at the same time, he had all the aces up his sleeve. Let no one think that he was ever a moderate. His only expertise is Islamic religion and many of his ministers were appointed on the basis of having studied like him at the religious university of Al Azhar in Cairo. He cherished the power that his religious halo gave him, for as both head of an Islamic state and religious leader he was invulnerable as long as he was at the forefront of keeping the Maldives as Islamic as possible. Thus, President Al-Ustaadh (Revered Teacher) Maumoon Abdul Gayyoom

was a zealous Islamic missionary from the start, and embarked on an ambitious programme of propagation and reinforcement of the Muslim doctrine that spared no Maldivian and reached every corner of the nation. After having opened hundreds of mosques and Islamic schools all over the Maldives, he sent many young men and women on scholarships to foreign Islamic hotbeds. He conveniently didn't want to have any Universities or centres of higher education close to his palaces.

But there seems to be no limit to the extremism that an Islamic education can produce, for the very people that Al-Ustaadh Maumoon Abdul Gayyoom trained have turned against him. The religious hard-liners that he himself bred in such numbers are now calling for his overthrow.

Compared to the present government and its long arm, the NSS (National Security Service), the fanatic hard-line religious leaders seem like good people. The NSS keeps people in fear; it is the Maldivian version of the former Iranian Savak. Police and Army at the same time, the NSS is not very competent when it comes to keep law and order. Drug trade and robberies are rife, which is quite amazing in such a small and tightly-controlled country. But NSS agents are highly effective when it comes to keep every Maldivian man and woman, old or young, in the grip of permanent terror.

Even though President Maumoon's detractors accuse him of not being Islamic enough, he has carried out such strongly religious-oriented Islamic domestic and foreign policies, that there is almost no room left for his potential successors to become more Islamic than him. They can hardly do anything new unless they crack down more ruthlessly on the personal lives of the Maldivian citizens and impose a Taliban-style rule whereby women die of hunger at home and everyone gets his share of Islamic Sharia' by being maimed, lashed or killed for the slightest offence.

It is not that President Maumoon is the best choice within the present scenario. He seems now almost certainly poised to be defeated, but he thought himself eternal and "forgot" to prepare the Maldives for the future. The brightest and most creative Maldivian intellectuals are now exiled or imprisoned, for they were easier to dispose of than the dissenting hard-line religious leaders. The atmosphere of lack of intellectual life and relevant knowledge that pervades the Maldives was cultivated by President Maumoon to the extent that the only substitute for intellectuality is Islamic religious study.

When the present "law and order" situation breaks down, the average Maldivian person who never enjoyed any freedom or any power, whether political or religious, will be left without knowing what to do. Maldivian nationalism, the Islamic religion and politics are so hopelessly muddled together that few people have clear ideas now, and their ideas will be even less clear in a changed scenario. Before the President is gone, and considering the dangers that loom ahead, this is the time that all Maldivians should brace themselves and think hard about what it is that they want for the future of their country.

The Maldives badly needs peace and a stable transition in which a democratic leader who knows how to train the people to be free and give freedom should emerge, but it definitely doesn't need another religious teacher cum tyrant.

Will the Maldivian people be able to rise out of the chaos and finally freely choose to live in a prosperous and free society where law and order, including respect for each others' freedoms, rules? Or will they have a continued religious hard-line threat looming over their heads, which will inevitably produce more people like President Maumoon in the future?□

