

Newsletter

Maldivian Democratic Party

15-31 August 2004; Issue 18

Gayoom Rules Under Emergency Power

On 13th August, Dictator Gayoom issued a Proclamation of Emergency invoking article 144 of the constitution. According to the article "where the President has determined that the security of the Maldives or part thereof is threatened by war or foreign aggression or civil unrest, the President shall have the right to issue a Proclamation of Emergency" According to article 145 "while the Proclamation of Emergency is in force, the President shall have the power to take and order all measures expedient to protect national security and public order. Such measures may include the suspension from time to time of fundamental rights as deemed appropriate by the President and suspension of laws which in the opinion of the President impede the maintenance of national security and public order"

Gayoom has been ruling the country with dictatorial power even without the proclamation of an emergency. Proclaiming an emergency is just a fig leaf to cover the draconian measures he and his hard-line family members and cronies are poised to take to thwart any ambition for reform and democracy the people of Maldives may harbor.

Gayoom has completely reneged on this 9th June offer of greater democracy, freedom and respect for human rights, just as soon as he realized that the people were taking his offer seriously. He retaliated by undermining fundamental freedoms of assembly, expression and on 13th August mercilessly beat up and detained over 200 pro-democracy activists and sympathizers. He justifies his draconian repression by branding peaceful protests for democracy as an act of rebellion.

On the 13th a group of thugs under the control of Gayoom's hard-line brother Minister Yameen (acting in concert with Head

Torturer Adam Zahir's NSS special squad) disrupted the peaceful gathering in the Republican Square. The NSS and the Yameen Militia now take comfort in the knowledge that their respective bosses (Adam Zahir and Yameen) are now in firm control of the country. They can, once again, beat people and violate the law with impunity. The NSS and the Yameen Militia now openly (and gleefully) issue death threats to reformists and their families. In the process of detention, excessive force and public humiliation was used, as a strategic measure to apply fear on the public. After being abused in the filthiest language, detainees were told that they will make cripples out of anyone who challenges Gayoom. Many were mercilessly beaten before being detained under the most horrendous, inhuman condition. Maumoon and his hard-line family members are sending a very clear message: we will resort to any measure to preserve our stranglehold on power.

The Kaaminee clan has weighed their options and the ferocity of their attack indicates that their strategy is to beat their opponents into submission first and take their chances with the international community there after. The oppression is brutal, unrelenting and pervasive.

For over 26 years the international community has been ignorant of, or has ignored Gayoom's oppressive rule. Even if the country is small, and geopolitically unimportant, the international community, on humanitarian grounds if nothing else, now needs to take note of the extremely volatile situation in the country. The rest of the world must not continue to ignore the plight of the people or give Gayoom time to consolidate his cruel, repressive rule. The international community needs to take decisive, principled and urgent steps to save the people of Maldives. The fates of the Maldivian people now lie in the hands of the international community □

Maldives on the brink of revolution as the desire for democracy appears insatiable

By Paul Roberts, Friends of Maldives

For most of the 40,000 tourists who visit the Maldives each month - an Indian Ocean archipelago off the southern-west coast of Sri Lanka - the return home is accompanied with tales of idyllic tropical islands ringed by turquoise waters and soft white sands. For the 250,000 inhabitants however, paradise is accompanied with the hell of tyranny. According to Amnesty International, the government of President Maumoon Gayoom is characterised by the widespread use of torture, routine detention of political opponents and a grossly unfair legal system.

"Gayoom is a dictator who sees himself as a heroic zaeem who knows what is best for his supplicants/subjects. The concept of participatory, liberal democracy is completely alien to this Ba'athist Dictator"

President Gayoom has ruled the Maldives with an iron fist for over 25 years. Recently though his grip appears to be slipping in the face of growing demands for democracy by an increasingly restless populous. As this article goes to press, a state of emergency has been introduced after a 5,000-strong anti-government demonstration in the capital, Male', was broken up by police baton-charges, tear gas and rubber bullets.

A year ago, the headline of this article would have sounded absurd. For 24 years Gayoom had managed to rule the Maldives with very little open dissent,

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internally at least. His leadership had been as strong as his methods have been ruthless.

The Maldives is to all in intents and purposes run along the lines of a police state, led by a near-omnipotent president. There are no political parties, there is no independent press and the police force, the office of the Attorney General, the ministry of Justice and the Parliament are, in effect, run by the president. The unsurprising result is that although enshrined as fundamental rights under the constitution, civil liberties such as the freedom of expression, association, the right not to be held arbitrarily, to a fair trial and to be free from torture are denied to Maldivian citizens. Gayoom's police and National Security Service (NSS) accompanied by unofficial hired thugs terrorise the people, crushing all dissent.

Gayoom makes no secret of his preferred style of governance. In his official biography, *A Man for all Islands*, published in 1998, there is musing of his first meeting with Saddam Hussein: "After dinner, Saddam took Maumoon aside and told him that to govern a country he needed to have an organisation...it was only through a one-party system that he was able to govern effectively. Following that visit, Maumoon developed a close friendship with Saddam Hussein." A few pages on Gayoom describes Fidel Castro as: "the revolutionary...whose name has become synonymous with freedom, justice and human dignity." Gayoom has always been Ba'athist in his political thinking but what has been disappointing is the way the international community tolerated him for so long. Even today the Maldives is still a full member of the Commonwealth despite frequently breaking the Harare principles with apparent impunity.

Yet things started to go seriously wrong for Gayoom in September 2003. An unprecedented anti-government riot erupted in the Maldives after prison guards opened fire on unarmed inmates in the Mafushi Jail, located just outside the capital. When news of killings reached Male' spontaneous riots ensued leaving the Electoral Commission and other government buildings in flames. Amnesty International described these riots as a political protest in response to the increasingly oppressive and brutal way Gayoom is ruling the island state. It appeared that the people had had enough.

Equally worrying for Gayoom has been the establishment of an organised opposition movement. The Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) was established in late 2003, in exile in Sri Lanka, with the goal of bringing democracy and respect for the rule of law to the Maldives. However, as spokesperson for the party Mohammed Latheef makes clear, this goal will never be realised with Gayoom in power: "Gayoom is a dictator who sees himself as a heroic zaeem who knows what is best for his supplicants/subjects. The concept of participatory, liberal democracy is completely alien to this Ba'athist Dictator"

Events of the last 12 months have also put the Maldives firmly on the international media radar screen. The BBC has reported from Male' frequently over the past year and dozens of newspapers have run stories on the Maldives, universal in their criticism of Gayoom. The only voice in support of the President is that of Hill & Knowlton, an international public relations firm, who have allegedly been paid \$2million by the Maldivian government to sing the praises of the President.


Along with recent pressure from international governments, notably from the British, Gayoom now appears more constrained than at any other point in his leadership. With an economy dependent on international aid and - mainly European - tourists he cannot afford to ignore the views of the international community who repeatedly demand democratic reform. Yet by initiating a process of political liberalisation Gayoom risks his very position as leader. It is becoming glaringly evident that his premiership is not, shall we say, based on the will of the people. Gayoom has instead tried to find a middle way, talking about reforms whilst attempting to prevent real change taking place.

Gayoom initiated a series of reform proposals in July 2004, including the pledge to rewrite the constitution. What he perhaps didn't bank on was the MDP taking a literal interpretation of his words. With a week of the President's talk of freedom of speech and association, the MDP held numerous public meetings discussing how democracy could be introduced in the islands. The meetings were attended by over 1000 people - in a country where six months ago voicing 'views contrary to the government' risked a lengthy period in one of the Maldives' notorious prisons. The regime attempted to counter the opposition movement with a campaign of dirty tricks, refusing to grant halls where meetings could take place and intimidating organisers. However, the opposition showed itself able to match Gayoom's cunning - holding 'picnics' on the beaches and 'birthday parties' in which the topic of debate for the thousands who attended was democracy, human rights and the desirability of Gayoom's resignation.

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Friends Of Maldives - Press Release

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14 August 2004 14:09 (BST)

Radio Station launched in Maldives - MINIVAN RADIO

Minivan Radio, the Free Radio of the Maldives, will transmit a **TEST broadcast** on Wednesday 18th August between 2100 - 2200hrs (Male' time).

We will confirm the frequency in the next two days.

The first half an hour will be tested at 100W and the second half hour will be tested at 250W. Do not be concerned if you cannot receive the first half of the radio programme or even the second half. We will persevere.

Once a successful transmission has been sent, it is hoped that a long term broadcast will start the following week. There will be a daily broadcast between 2100 and 2200 Daily.

Tune in for the Real News, music, discussion and lots more. Tell your friends.

Please let us know if you could or could not receive the broadcast in your area.



Press release, 08/13/2004

Amnesty International

Maldives: Peaceful demonstrators beaten and detained

Over a dozen peaceful demonstrators have been taken into custody by the Maldivian authorities in the past few hours. Amnesty International is calling on the Maldivian government to ensure their safety and security, after emerging reports of security forces beating those in detention.

Dr Mohamed Monawar, the former Attorney General of the Maldives and an

opposition party leader, and Muad Mohamed Zaki, the son of the political prisoner Mohamed Zaki, have both been beaten while in custody today.

Amnesty International is deeply concerned at reports of large numbers of injured people needing hospital treatment after the police used sticks and batons to attack them during the

demonstrations. The organization is urging the government to adhere to international human rights standards.

The government declared a state of emergency today as mass demonstrations took place over the last week against the slow pace of reform and the continued detention of political prisoners. □



President Gayoom cuts off Internet links with outside world

Reporters Without Borders expressed outrage today at Maldivian President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom's action in cutting the entire country off from the Internet in the wake of demonstrations against his regime over the past two days.

"This grave and irresponsible step is unprecedented anywhere in the world and President Gayoom has embarked on a spiral of repression that is extremely worrying," it said, calling on the international community to urgently press for a halt to the crackdown and for the release of three detained journalists of the e-mailed newsletter Sandhaanu who have vanished since the protests.

The British-owned telecommunications firm Cable & Wireless, which handles local Internet access, confirmed the government had cut off all Internet connections. About 90 people, including members of parliament, are thought to have been arrested after the demonstration. □

13.08.2004 - Police attack protesters calling for release of jailed cyber-dissidents

Reporters Without Borders expressed disgust at today's violent break-up by Maldives police of a demonstration by several thousand people calling for the release of political prisoners, including three cyber-dissidents of the e-mailed newsletter Sandhaanu.

"Crushing this demonstration contravenes all the promises made by President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom since June to set up a democratic and transparent political system," it said. "We demand that the government ends such repression at once, does not prosecute any of the protesters and frees opposition figure Naushad Waheed and the Sandhaanu cyber-dissidents."

Police attacked the protesters with truncheons and iron bars after President Gayoom announced that the organisers had been identified and would be punished. Many demonstrators were arrested, a state of emergency declared and a curfew imposed. Waheed and the cyber-dissidents then disappeared.

The protest had begun late on 12 August in the capital, Male, in response to the arrest in the previous days of five political dissidents, the best-known of whom, Mohamed "Fulu" Yusuf, was released soon after the demonstration started.

Some of the protesters went to the homes of Waheed (detained in December 2001) and the three cyber-dissidents - Mohamed Zaki, Ahmad Didi and Fathimath Nisreen - who were picked up in January 2002. All four, who were released into house arrest several months ago, went to the demonstration, which was staged in front of the National Security Service headquarters, and addressed the crowd.

A leaflet was handed out criticising the lack of press freedom in the country and quoting Reporters Without Borders, which has put President Gayoom on its worldwide list of "predators of press freedom." The protesters also called on Gayoom to resign.

The British-based human rights group Friends of Maldives said state security agents had gone to the offices of the state-owned TV Maldives and the radio station Voice of Maldives to supervise reporting of the events. □

Reporters Without Borders defends imprisoned journalists and press freedom throughout the world, as well as the right to inform the public and to be informed, in accordance with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Reporters Without Borders has nine national sections (in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom), representatives in Abidjan, Bangkok, Istanbul, Montreal, Moscow, New York, Tokyo and Washington and more than a hundred correspondents worldwide.

Letters

Here are some thoughts and observations I would like to share with the readers:

Beating of Detainees

Many of the protestors/reformists taken by the NSS were brutally and mercilessly beaten and threatened with death. The detainees are being kept under horrendous conditions. Does the rest of the world care? Where are the champions of freedom and democracy and human rights? Is there no concern when their self interest is not threatened?

Yameen's Thugs

Yameen has poured in hundreds of thousands of ill-gotten Rufiya to form a band of dedicated thugs. They have been trying to disrupt peaceful pro-democracy meetings and gatherings for weeks, yet the police take no action. Why? Because he is working in tandem with Police Commissioner Adam Zahir and his band of specially trained NSS goons known as AZ's Star Team. Yameen and Adam Zahir have been working closely even in the distribution of death threats and hate literature.

Internet Hate Sites

The government has banned all sites critical of its policy but sites sporting hate and filth at reformists are allowed to function freely! Why? Because the sites are operated by President Gayoom's Executive Secretary Abdulla Shahid, friends of Yameen based in Lanka and Maldives and NSS officers whose only job is respond to reformist literature and to write filth in return. Gayoom's own Bengali son-in-law (often helped by Gayoom's children and relatives) too operate their own hate sites.

Internet Service Disrupted

Internet service has been stopped on order of the government. This is in violation of article 20 of the constitution which states that "letters, messages, telephonic conversations and such other means of communication shall be inviolable." The government regularly taps telephones and intercepts letters and other means of communication.

Detention of Special Majlis Members

Many reformists MP's have been taken into custody by Gayoom. This includes the reformists' choice for Speaker of the Special Majlis, Gasim Ibrahim. Is it not obvious that Gayoom is gearing to, once again, manipulate and have a constitution tailor-made to suit his purpose? Those detained

are among the most competent in the Majlis and include former attorney General, Dr. Munavvar, former SAARC Secretary General Ibrahim Hussein Zaki, Ibrahim Ismail and Dr. Hussain Rasheed. These arrests, three days before the scheduled Majlis meeting stink, does it not?

Detainees kept incommunicado

Family members of the recently arrested reformists were bluntly told that they will not be given information about the detainees. They are not being given access to lawyers. Why? Because they are being subject to torture and cruel and inhuman treatment Does the President's emergency powers of "suspension from time to time of fundamental rights as deemed appropriate by the President and suspension of laws which in the opinion of the President impede the maintenance of national security and public order" include the right to torture? None of the members of the Special Majlis detained took part in the protest. In fact what they did was to help calm the situation at the behest of the President himself. Should not the cruel treatment of members of the constituent assembly persuade the rest of the world to look more seriously at Gayoom's insane hunger for power.

Knifing of Two Policemen

It was quite obvious that Adam Zahir's NSS goons and Yameen's thugs were acting under a well orchestrated plan to incite the disturbances that was the excuse to crack down so severely on demonstrators. At least one of the cops knifed was by a former prisoner who was earlier tortured by his victim. Was the knifing a spontaneous act or pre-planned?

Made for TV Fires

The fire at the Huravee Building was stage-managed for TV. The fire lorries were in place well before the incident and a wooden door was set on fire. While one may appreciate Yameen's restraint in not completely damaging public property, one has to admit that his was a very unconvincing performance.

Gayoom's Insanity

Article 47(c) says that the President can be removed from office for "intentional violation of the constitution" Gayoom intentionally violates the constitution on a regular basis. However, there is possible another ground on which Gayoom can be removed from office. According to article 47(b) The President can be removed if he "becomes permanently incapacitated to discharge the functions of his office by reasons of mental or physical infirmity" Recent behavior on Gayoom's part suggests to me that the poor man is, if not physically, at least mentally infirm. □

However, the scale of the protests on Thursday evening (12th August), where 5,000 people gathered outside the NSS headquarters in central Male' calling for democratic reform and the release of political prisoners, seems to have seriously shocked the regime. It also appears to have caused a split in Gayoom's inner circle. During an emergency cabinet meeting hardliners - headed by Adam Zakir, the police chief and someone associated as head torturer - seem to have won the argument. Soon after the meeting ended, thugs recognised as loyal to the regime were seen entering the crowd of protesters. To the horror of the people, they started to throw bottles at the police who immediately responded with baton-charges, tear gas and rubber bullets. Dozens of people have reportedly been injured and waves of arrested of reformists have taken place. The capital remains under a tense curfew and armoured personnel carriers prowl the streets.

For Gayoom there seems to be two options left: continue the crackdown, ignore the inevitable outrage of the international community and risk sanctions which would wreck the Maldivian economy, not to mention 74 year-old President's place in history; or introduce genuine democratic reform and accept that bowing out gracefully is the best option for everyone, even if it means Gayoom and his cronies become part of Maldivian history quicker than they would like.

As the tear gas begins to lift on the streets of the capital, the next few weeks will be crucial for the future of the country and the stability of the wider region. Gayoom's policy of fudging reform is in tatters. There is now little ground between the poles of democratic revolution and Zimbabwe-fication in the Maldives.

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Press Statement

14th August 2004

President Gayoom has ruled the Maldives for the past 26 years as a police state. The international outcry against his brutal rule, following the torture/killing of an unarmed prisoner last September, forced Gayoom to offer an insincere agenda of reform. His call for open debate was well received by his countrymen who long for greater freedom and participatory democracy. When he realized the people were taking his offer seriously, Gayoom systematically reneged on his promises and clamped down on the people's constitutional rights to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression.

The crackdown culminated in invoking a Proclamation of Emergency yesterday, Friday 13th, following a demonstration started on 12th evening. The demonstrators, estimated to be over five thousand, called upon the Government for the release of the recently detained pro-democracy activists. They also called for the resignation of some of Gayoom's hard-line ministers.

The National Security Service(NSS), assisted by a militia controlled by Gayoom's hard-line brother Minister Yameen, Executive Secretary to the President, Abdullah Shahid and Police Commissioner Adam Zahir is on a rampage of violence against pro-democracy activists. Activists were beaten up in their homes and were also subject to verbal abuse and threats by the NSS. Rubber bullets and tear gas, too, were used. MDP members Muad Zaki and Ziyad were so brutally beaten they are now under intensive medical care.

Among those arrested are leading businessman Hon. Gasim Ibrahim (former President of SAARC Chamber of Commerce), Hon. Ibrahim Hussein Zaki (former Minister of Planning and former Secretary General of SAARC), Hon. Muhammed Munavvar (former Attorney General) and Hon. Ibrahim Ismail. All four are members of the Special Majlis.

The hard-line members of Gayoom's family, led by Minister Yameen, have openly and defiantly indicated that they will maintain their family stranglehold on power using every method at their disposal. This militia is behind the spate of death threats and hate mail being circulated in Male. They act as agents provocateurs and operate openly and freely with total impunity under the protection of the NSS.

The situation in Male' is extremely volatile. The Maldivian Democratic Party earnestly appeals to the international community to take the dangerous developments in Maldives seriously and to take positive and effective steps to ensure that the country does not slide into further chaos and violence.

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