

Culture of torture continues

The governments of the Maldives practiced torture and excessive dictatorial powers even during the years when a kingdom existed in the country. The history of Maldives recalls not too few despot kings who tortured their subjects to impose the will of the state. Rumours and whispers about people being buried alive in the premises of palaces were reinforced by stories of skeletons being found in ceramic containers buried in palace grounds.

The introduction of a republic in 1953 did little to bring basic human rights and human dignity for the Maldivian people. Even though the United Nations, after a terrible world war, composed a Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Maldivian people continued to live in a state of subjugation, oppressed and suppressed. The first president Amin Didi did not pay much attention to personal liberties and freedom while the second president Ibrahim Nasir was loathed for his dictatorial powers and iron-fisted rule. Nasir suppressed rebellions in southern atolls with excessive force, once forcefully evacuating the people of Thinadhoo island, and burning down the island. Political prisoners as well as other inmates were tortured severely. Even now people from that generation recoil at the mention of the notorious prisons such as the Villingili Jail built on Villingili island in Male' Atoll.

Nasir's successor Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who studied at Egypt, was perceived to be a soft-spoken scholar. He promised equality and justice for the people. However, any hopes of a better life faded when Gayoom began strong arm tactics, similar to the ones practised by successive Egyptian governments, to silence any form of dissent in the society.

Members of the parliament whose views were critical of the regime were imprisoned and tortured. Abdul Azeez Mohamed, commonly known as Meedhoo Azee, was an MP who was tortured and turned into a cripple, after his criticism of government policies while speaking in the parliament.

Tales of torture continued and torture became an effective method to control dissent and for the survival of the regime. Torture became an inherent part of the regime, perfected and customised, as in other totalitarian regimes across the world. Not only were political prisoners tortured, but prisoners serving sentences for petty theft and people detained for minor offences such as riding a bicycle at night without a lamp became the subjects of torture and terror.

In a way Gayoom's regime inherited some of the torture tactics from the previous rulers. Ilyas Ibrahim, Gayoom's brother-in-law, was the Deputy Minister of Defence and National Security and during the 1980s he was in charge of torture by NSS. Ilyas was a close associate of former president Nasir.

MaldivesCulture.com, an independent website, has reported that senior NSS officers received written approval from Ilyas Ibrahim to torture detainees and prisoners. The orders were written in the infamous 'torture books' which are said to be taken out of the country now.

Among the senior NSS officers one man emerged as a person who is particularly fond of torture. Adam Zahir, a young officer recruited by Gayoom after coming to power in 1978, eventually became the Commissioner of Police. Zahir, who was used by Gayoom to mould the NSS to suit the dictator's taste, is now so well-known for his sadism and torture that some people call him 'Head Torturer'.

Several people have died in jails of the Maldives after being severely tortured. The relatives of the dead ones are silenced through fear and intimidation. The relatives only see the bodies before they are hastily buried. Sometimes Police Headquarters announces prisoners as missing persons. Some of those missing persons are believed to have been killed in jail and buried there without even informing the relatives.

The death of Hassan Eavan Naseem from torture at Maafooshi jail on 19 September 2003 brought unprecedented attention to torture in jail. It has ignited an opposition to the regime which over the past months have become a strong force. However, despite the world attention on the politics of the country, and a vigilant opposition movement, the culture of torture continues.

The death of Muaviath Mahmood, under police custody, at Dhoonidhoo detention island, on 9 March 2005 raises more questions about torture in jails. Even though the reason of Muaviath's death cannot be confirmed yet, the most likely reason is that he was tortured.

On 12 March 2005 another person, Ibrahim Mohamed, was admitted at hospital after being severely tortured by police at Dhoonidhoo.

Reports from jails in the Maldives confirm that torture is continuing. The use of violence by police while arresting Ahmed Falah in Male' in January 2005 for videoing a disturbance at a polling station only proves that the new civilian police force has inherited the same tactics used while the police force was part of the NSS.

The killing of Eavan Naseem was a grave mistake and the regime has not yet recovered from the damage. The fact that the regime has turned to torture so soon proves that torture is indispensable for the survival of the regime. Only by destroying the regime can Maldivians be free from tyranny.

“One day on 22 June 2003, during the six months I was kept in Dhoonidhoo prison, I had the opportunity to see Brigadier Adam Zahir from the National Security Service police. During the conversation between us, and in reply to a complaint I made, Adam Zahir said that everything was being carried out according to the instructions of President Maumoon Gayyoom.

He also said that there was nothing the President Gayyoom was not being informed about, regardless how important or minor the matter was. After these words from Adam Zahir, it became clear to me that everything was happening with the full knowledge of President Gayyoom. This realisation was endlessly distressing.”

**Maldivian prisoner of conscience Mohamed Zaki in a letter sent to
Maldives Human Rights Commission**

Gross and inhuman torture carried out in Maldives prisons

Ibrahim Lutfy, Sandhaanu, 19 September 2004
Translated by RESIST

Nobody will inflict pain on own self because one will realise and understand the pain one will go through. In the same way, one should understand that if one inflicts pain on another person that person will also feel pain. So nobody should torture another. As one desires justice for one's self, one should agree for others to receive it. Everybody should love justice and equality. Nobody should support revenge and cruelty. People should wage a fierce fight against an oppressor. This does not mean exterminating the oppressor and neither does it mean killing the oppressor. It means eliminating the oppression of the oppressor. If people show weakness in the face of an oppressor and does not fight against oppression, the oppressor will feel that there is nobody more powerful and that the people will live with fear and cowardice and live with submission. Living without resistance under an oppressor means inviting tyranny. It is a virtue not to resort to revenge. Measures taken against oppressors and steps taken to overcome them could not be described as avenging. That is a lesson to oppressors. If oppressors know that there are people who are smarter than them and that there are few people who will submit to their demands, then their treacherous plans will decrease, and the society could be made safer. Instead if people pretend not to see or know about the oppression, the result will be bitter. Today we all are regretting because of this complacency.

Living without resistance under an oppressor means inviting tyranny.

I believe that the results of the hard work done with patriotic spirit by several Maldivians within a short span of time are yielding positively. As unity is strength, when we united to bring an end to tyranny, the oppressors received a sudden shock. At the point when we showed them our power and courage, they were forced to retreat in their oppression. This is a fact.

My Testimony

In this time of sadness, I am giving my testimony not to encourage any party to seek revenge from Maumoon. I myself do not want to take revenge from Maumoon. However, I work restlessly to bring an end to the tyranny of Maumoon. He should ask for our forgiveness for the crimes he has committed. We need reforms, true reforms, and change that is free from any deception. We need to establish a fine system so that oppression could not be practiced in the future. I call to facilitate such change. Very grave consequences might occur if (Maumoon) plays a game in the name of 'reform' without asking the people for forgiveness.

I saw all prisons made during President Maumoon's rule. I would not say that was a misfortune. I got the opportunity to study up to PhD about the inhuman and heartless torture in prisons of the Maldives, the unfair investigations and the unfair trials. I learned all those things very attentively. That was a stroke of very good luck. My thesis has been written based on truth. Since Maumoon does not like people who speak the truth I was not given the title of Doctor. Instead he gave me pain. Not a small pain but torture that would cause suffering throughout the rest of life. Yes, during Maumoon's rule, I have been taken to prison ten times during the past seventeen years and have been subjected to various forms of torture. I never went to prison voluntarily to receive the torture. I was never a thief, a pirate, a person who fought with people, a deceiver, a drug user or a drug dealer. I was imprisoned because I criticised the unjust policies of the government and the cruel methods of the police. I was jailed 'to reduce' my 'size'. Because I speak based on fairness and the right way, police ask me why I have 'misunderstood my size.' Because I do not know the 'size' in which the police want to keep me, they try to force the 'size' they want on me. With the blessings

of Allah, and with the will of Allah, I am still living in my own size.

During President Maumoon's rule, when I was becoming aware of facts of life, I heard about torture in prison. But I did not believe that such talk was true. Because of the smooth talk of Maumoon and his quiet manner, it was difficult to believe that he will intentionally perpetuate such torture as people narrated. As I became more aware of things, I heard more stories of torture.

When I was imprisoned I did not sit idly as a lost person. I asked the inmates I met and some good guards who came on duty about the methods of torture, tactics of investigations and information on other things. I did not just believe what every prisoner said. I did not accept anything as truth without listening to tales of several people and thinking about them. When I first witnessed the horrible torture of the prison I urinated because of fear.

After the first experience I concluded that the torture occurred without Maumoon's knowledge. So I tried to convey the information to Maumoon through a senior government official. I was advised not to tell anybody about what I saw in prison. I sought the advice of elders. Everybody said the same thing. That is Maumoon was aware of the torture in jail but did not want to investigate it. I did not conclude that as a fact even by then. However I believed that there was some truth in the advice I was given. Most people think that talking about torture in prison is a useless task. Even though the torture occurs and is real, it is not to be mentioned to save one from further suffering. If people talk about torture by police and the unfair actions of government offices, it is regarded as meddling with the policies of the government. People stay silent because otherwise they will have to return to prison.

In the end I wrote a letter to Maumoon with the intention of finding a solution to the inhuman and cruel torture I witnessed several times in jail. I also wrote that the things I had to tell him were linked to national safety and requested an appointment. I wrote very clearly that I could not tell those details in writing. I received the reply that it was very difficult to meet because of time constraints and I was asked to tell what I had to say in a letter. It was a time when stories of torturing of a very famous person of Male' and his friends in jail were circulating. Because of the severity of the torture, and because if they were brought to Male' for treatment the public would discover more, they were treated by bringing doctors and nurses to Dhoonidhoo. The policemen who tortured were suspended. This was because the case was leaked so much. Referring to this case, I wrote a letter to the President and the Commissioner of Police about the torture in prison. In addition, I tried in several ways to tell these stories to Maumoon. I did not succeed. From that point I concluded that President Maumoon did not want to check anything that was concerned with national safety. I also believed that he did not care whatever torture and suffering people went through.

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Sometime after I wrote that letter, I had to encounter police cruelty again. This time, I wrote to Maumoon, while in prison. I told that the police had detained me in violation of the laws of the Maldives and violated many rights of mine. I received the reply to the letter three months after I was released after I had spent almost two months in jail. "Ibrahim Lutfy has been detained concerning a case police is investigating, and according to the laws and regulations of the Maldives, following a court order by a judge," the reply said. The reply that I received from the President's Office said that. Even though President Maumoon had said so, I was never taken to court and I did not meet a judge. No judge could issue an order to detain me

without questioning me first. Such an order will be illegal. I then concluded that Maumoon believed that Maldivian people were an ignorant lot.

I believe it is the responsibility of each Maldivian to try to stop the torture in prison because it is a sensitive matter related to national safety and public order. I prepared a detailed report of 52 pages about the torture prisoners go through and that I myself experienced. I sent the letter to President Maumoon, members of the cabinet, Attorney General, Justice Minister, Chief Justice, President of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, Chief Judge of Criminal Court, members of the parliament, and all candidates contesting in the parliamentary election of 1999. I also sent this report to many people in Male' and other islands. With this report I sent a letter to Maumoon explaining that I needed to tell him further details of torture in prison and requested an appointment.

Instead of granting an appointment President Maumoon arrested me and detained me in a small cell in Dhoonidhoo in solitary confinement for three months. When I asked the police why I was being arrested, they replied that it was because I had 'sent letters to various people accusing

I had a national duty to do it. I did not write the letters and report to discredit the reputation of the police. What I wrote was the truth. I believe that President Maumoon has to be fully responsible for all inhuman torture in prison and outside prison that had taken place during his rule. If Maumoon and his senior government officials had listened to the complaints of several citizens like me, and those who had suffered, there would not have been any opportunity for the brutal torturing to death of Hassan Eavan Naseem on 19 September 2003. Similarly the cruel act of shooting unarmed prisoners at Maafushi jail the next day and killing three people and wounding about twenty people could have been prevented. And the riots in Male' on that day (September 20) would not have occurred.

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the police.' Six months after I was released I received a letter from the President's Office. "President tells to inform that an appointment could not be given because Ibrahim Lutfy had not acted correctly," the letter said.

I sent the letters and report to different people to publicise it because I had informed President Maumoon through various ways about the torture in prison but he had not taken any step to prevent it. I did this because

President Maumoon presented to the parliament the reports on findings of the Presidential Commission on the killing of Eavan Naseem and the shooting at Maafushi after omitting the most important findings with the justification that they were omitted for 'national security and safety. I am quoting what he said while presenting the reports to the parliament on 27 January 2004.

"The government had never permitted anybody to be tortured or physically harmed in anyway during the stage of investigation and also while a person was undergoing a sentence. If such incidents occur, they happen without the knowledge of the government. If anybody complains about such a thing, I am now also investigating it by sending the cases to a selected committee....So torture during investigation and also after sentencing was never permitted by the government.... I thought that even though the honourable members are aware of this fact, it will be important to state it in such an occasion as this," Maumoon said.

If what I had said in my testimony above was true then President Maumoon is lying. Or else I am lying about President Maumoon. The truth is one of these scenarios.

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Ibrahim Lutfy, Maldivian dissident and editor of Sandhaanu newsletter

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Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, Asia's longest ruling dictator

Icon of Resistance: Mariyam Manike

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On 9 March 2005, the day his dead son was brought to Male' from Dhoonidhoo detention island, to be buried at the new cemetery, Mahmood was interviewed by Minivan Radio, an independent opposition radio. Mahmood believed that his son was killed by the police. He had not got hold of the medical reports even when his son Muaviath was buried at the young age of 28. Asked if he would try to find the reason of his son's death Mahmood said in the course of trying to find out the reasons for Muaviath's death he will be destroyed. He said he had other children to feed, a family to look after, and if he tried to pursue the reasons for his son's death, he will be crushed in the process. Has anything happened in a different manner in the past, he asked.

In some aspects Mahmood is right. He is a bit resigned to fate and his interview echoes the same fears that the parents of other young people, killed through torture in Maldives prisons, felt after their children were buried. It is those fears that have allowed the regime to continue to torture prisoners and detainees. For decades parents have been living with anguished thoughts and disturbing memories, unable to speak for justice because of the fear.

There are exceptions. The mother of Hassan Eavan Naseem has relentlessly fought for justice in case of the murder of her son. Mariyam Manike has emerged as an icon of resistance against terror and torture. If not for the strong will and determination of Mariyam Manike and a few others, the body of Hassan Eavan Naseem would have been buried in silence as so many other victims of torture. The inmates at prison who rose against the brutal killing were instrumental in bringing the matter into attention. Some of them paid with their lives for that act of heroism. There were people in Male' who threw away the white sheet covering the wounds and brought people to see the horrific sight of Eavan's battered body. All of them deserve praise for their actions. As the masses gathered, as the police vehicles were set on fire and as the police stations were burnt to the ground, a murder was slowly uncovered.

The death of Muaviath did not spark such eventful incidents. It went largely unnoticed by the people and was covered mostly in silence.

Mahmood was right for fearing for his future. Mariyam Manike has experienced long spells of detention, abuse and harassment for her determined quest to seek justice. But she herself knows the stakes involved.

"I think I will be destroyed in this cause. But I do not want to live in a system like this, that is so unjust and so deceptive," she told Minivan Radio after eight people suspected of murdering her son were convicted and sentenced to death and four others were acquitted.

"The message I want to give all Maldivians is for everybody to come out bravely to seek justice instead of tyranny. I am one of those who were tortured after the 12-13th August [demonstration last year] so I would like those who love us and those who sympathise with us to come out and support us and to support those who have been tortured." Mariyam said on Minivan Radio.

As long as we keep silent about torture the killings and beatings will continue. Yesterday it was Mariyam Manike's son, today it is Mahmood's son and tomorrow it will be somebody else's child. Fear and silence will not bring an end to tyranny but only strengthen it.

**"So long as Maumoon is in power the
Maldives will see nothing but injustice and
people will always have tyranny. This man is
a great tyrant."**

**Mariyam Manike, mother of torture victim
Eavan Naseem, on Minivan Radio**

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Dissident Watch

Mohamed Zaki, Ibrahim Lutfy, Ahmed Ibrahim Didi were sentenced to life in prison two years ago in July. It was on 7 July 2002 that the three men were given the sentence, and Fathimath Nisreen was sentenced to ten years in jail, for conspiring in an act against the state through their alleged involvement in Sandhaanu, an underground newsletter. The three men were also sentenced to one year banishment for defamation while Nisreen received a sentence of one year house arrest for defamation.

On 19 May 2003, Ibrahim Lutfy escaped from a hotel in Sri Lanka, while he was detained by Maldivian police. He was taken to Sri Lanka for a medical treatment. He sought protection of the UNHCR and later received political asylum from a European country.

In December 2003, the government of the Maldives reduced the life sentence of Ahmed Didi and Mohamed Zaki to 15 years and reduced the sentence of Nisreen to five years. Nisreen was released from prison but banished to Feeali island in Faafu Atoll. The reduction in sentence was made after mounting pressure from international human rights organisations and journalist protection groups in the wake of the September 2003 riots in prison.

When Black Friday (13 August 2004) arrived Mohamed Zaki, Ahmed Didi and Fathimath Nisreen were under house arrest in Male' because they had been brought to Male' due to illness. Ahmed Didi and Nisreen spoke in the gathering of Black Friday. After that they were arrested and were detained in Dhoonidhoo island. Mohamed Zaki was transferred to Maafushi jail again after Black Friday. Fathimath Nisreen was put under house arrest and then banished to Feeali island again after a long ordeal in the Dhoonidhoo detention island.

Even though it is believed that cases regarding Black Friday will be dropped, as indicated by the government after the tsunami, there is no indication at all concerning any amnesty for Sandhaanu prisoners regarding their ongoing sentences.

Both Zaki and Didi are very ill and Ahmed Didi is a registered heart patient. Doctors have recommended providing him with adequate medical care from abroad, which the regime in the Maldives continues to deny him. Following torture after Black Friday, Nisreen is having severe pain in her backbone and needs urgent medical attention.

We call upon the government of the Maldives for the unconditional and immediate release of Zaki, Didi and Nisreen. The constitution of the Maldives grants the freedom of expression and all the Sandhaanu creators did was to express their opinions about government policies. The right to legal representation is granted by the constitution of the Maldives but in Sandhaanu trial the defendants were denied legal representation. Hence the trial was unconstitutional.

Please write to international human rights organizations and organizations working for the protection of journalists, asking them to press for the release of those prisoners of conscience.

Ibrahim Fareed Ahmed was arrested on 8 June 2002 for delivering a religious lecture that criticized government policies. He was kept under solitary confinement at the Police Headquarters in Male' for 29 days. He was then transferred to Dhoonidhoo island where he was kept under solitary confinement for 5 months and 25 days. Fareed was then brought back to Male' and kept under house arrest for 2 months and 12 days. He was then transferred to Dhoonidhoo again and was kept under solitary confinement for 7 months. In October 2003 he was brought back to Male' and kept under house arrest. On 1 April 2004 he was released from house arrest but was not permitted to travel outside the capital city.

On 28 May 2004 Ministry of Information, Arts and Culture published on its website a reply made by the government of Maldives to Amnesty International about Fareed's case. It said "Ibrahim Fareed was arrested and charged over plots to carry out numerous terrorist activities including blowing up places of entertainment, kidnapping senior Government officials, sabotaging the tourism industry and instigating calls for a violent jihad."

After receiving this information Fareed sent a letter to Attorney General's Office inquiring about the charges against him. The Attorney General's Office replied that "The case brought against Ibrahim Fareed by this Office, the case which is now being conducted at the Criminal Court are, attempting to carry out an act against the state and speaking to people in a way that could create religious thoughts and making religious speeches in a way that could have undermined the rights of some people in the Maldivian society. No other case is recorded in this Office except those mentioned here."

On 29 July 2002 Ministry of Defence and National Security replied to a letter submitted by Abdullah Saeed, Sweet Meat house, Dhaalu Atoll Kudahuvadhoo asking to clarify the reason for Fareed's arrest. The reply said: "Ibrahim Fareed is detained due to allegedly speaking in a way that could divide them under the Religious Unity Protection Law."

When the free debates started in Male' in mid-2004 Fareed also started speaking in the debates. Fareed was perceived as a political threat again and the government started his trial. On 11 August 2004 a judge tried to hand over a long sentence to Fareed and a large crowd gathered near the Justice Building. Later that day Fareed and some supporters held a march on streets of Male'.

Fareed also addressed the gathering on Black Friday. After that his photo was shown on national television as a wanted person. Later Fareed was arrested and several charges were pressed including planning terrorist activities. NSS tortured Fareed after his arrest. Fareed was later sentenced to two years in prison in September 2004. There were reports that he was tortured even later. We are particularly concerned with reports that Fareed is unable to walk after injuries he sustained from torture.

What we can see as reasons for his arrest are expressing his views and also being a threat to the regime. Please write to international human rights organizations asking them to work to free this prisoner of conscience.

Naushad Waheed, the double agent and government informer, was put under house arrest after serving part of his 15-year jail sentence. Naushad, a famous artist, was arrested on 9 December 2001 and kept in prison before he was transferred to house arrest prior to the trial. He was sentenced on 14 October 2002. It is believed that he was sentenced because of writing to Amnesty International. The media in Maldives did not mention Naushad's jail sentence. Naushad had often informed the police about dissidents while at times he was at the other end of political spectrum, being arrested for his involvement in activities against the regime. We reported in Maverick 3.35 that Naushad was sentenced to 18 years in jail, and it was erroneous and based on wrong information. Regardless of Naushad's character, we do not see writing to Amnesty International as a crime or offence. So we believe Naushad's arrest, sentencing and detention are unfair. Naushad has launched his website in which he has published some paintings illustrating the torture and inhuman cruelty prisoners go through in jails of Maldives. We applaud Naushad for this brave act especially as he was under detention. We urge all prisoners who have been detained unfairly to stand up for their rights and publicize their condition. On 13 August 2004 Naushad also addressed the gathering at Republican Square and detailed the torture he went through in jail. He has the rights to express his opinions like that. After the Black Friday Naushad was arrested and was detained. Even though it is believed that cases regarding Black Friday will be dropped, as indicated by the government after the tsunami, there is no indication at all concerning any amnesty for Naushad regarding his ongoing jail sentence. We call upon the government of the Maldives for the unconditional and immediate release of Naushad Waheed. Please write to international human rights organizations asking them to press for the release of this prisoner of conscience.

From Maldives constitution

25. Every citizen shall have the freedom to express his conscience and thoughts orally or in writing or by other means, unless prohibited by law in the interest of protecting the sovereignty of the Maldives, of maintaining public order and of protecting the basic tenets of Islam.

26. Persons shall be free to assemble peaceably and in a manner that does not contravene the law.

16.—(1) Every person shall be presumed innocent until proven guilty.

(2) Every person who is charged with an offence shall have the right to defend himself in accordance with Shari'ah. To this effect, such a person shall be allowed to obtain the assistance of a lawyer whenever such assistance is required.