

Maldivian dissidents sentenced to life imprisonment

The producers of the underground Maldivian newsletter Sandhaanu have been sentenced to life imprisonment. Three men received the sentence while a girl received a sentence of 10 years of imprisonment for alleged involvement in Sandhaanu.

The three men who received life imprisonment sentences are Ibrahim Moosa Luthfee, age 37, from Fenmulu house in Hithadhoo island, Addu atoll and residing at Park View house in Galolhu ward Malé, Mohamed Zaki, age 50, from Ahmadheeabaadh house Maafannu ward Malé, and Ahmed Ibrahim Didi, age 50, from Karishmaavilla house Maafannu ward Malé and originally from Hulhudhoo island in Addu Atoll. They also received a 12 month banishment sentence for defaming the character of the President.

Fathimath Nishreen, age 21, from Three Bird house Maafannu ward Malé, received a 10 year jail term for allegedly writing baseless articles against the government, for expressing her dissatisfaction towards the government and for sending e-mail to Sandhaanu editors expressing support to the newsletter. Nishreen also received a sentence of one-year term of house arrest for attempting to defame the character of the President and other high government officials.

Abdullah Areef, Judge of the Criminal Court, handed over the sentences on Sunday, 7 July 2002.

"No defense by the prisoners or lawyers was allowed at the trial on Sunday, and Luthfee appealed to the judge to increase his sentence from 25 to 500 years, stating that it was his desire to remain in gaol until President Gayyoom was out of office. Everyone inside the court burst out laughing," maldivesculture.com reported.

The sentencing of the prisoners was the culmination of a long episode of dissent in the Maldives. Since Zaki and Luthufy were arrested in late January and the other two were arrested later, there have been no reports in the official media about their whereabouts. However, the sentences received ample publicity in the government-sponsored media. The Voice of Maldives broke the news in their morning news while the daily Miadhu ran a news on July 9.

"Dhivehi language newspaper Miadhu introduced its 9 July report under the lengthy banner headline:

Three people have been given life sentences for writing and distributing Sandhaanu newspaper to many recipients by e-mail; for publishing baseless stories that could create ill-will between the government and the people; and for calling upon the public to rise against the constitutionally established government of Maldives," Maldivesculture.com said.

The morning daily Aafathis also published a detailed report.

"Maldives' Aafathis newspaper on 9 July announced that the court made its ruling on two counts of allegations raised by the government prosecution. One was committing acts that were hostile to the government and the second was the offence of defamation. The report said the prisoners were sentenced on the first count under section 29 of the Maldives Penal Code.

'The prosecution raised claims in court against these people for using vile language to make accusations against the President, encouraging the public to change the legitimate government of Maldives, writing inaccurate material that would cause strife between the government and the public, and compiling a newsletter named Sandhaanu and distributing it on a large scale by means of email and in breach of the law,' the report said." Maldivesculture.com said.

Maldivesculture.com said that the defamation case was raised with relevance to section 150 and section 152 of the Maldives Constitution and on the defamation count the prisoners were sentenced under section 163 of the Maldives Penal Code. However, the editors of the Maldivesculture.com stated that sections 150 and 152 of the Maldives constitution do not refer in any way to defamation of the President.

"Section 150 refers to 'Inexpediciencies at the time this Constitution comes into force', and section 152 is a short sentence regarding the 'Manner of ascertaining period and date'.

The only part of the constitution that could be related to the charges seems to be

Section 12 — High Treason:

12. (1) Any person who, by the threat or use of force or in violation of the Constitution, abrogates or attempts to abrogate the Constitution or attempts to undermine the Constitution or conspires to commit any of the said acts shall be guilty of high treason.

(2) Any person who aids and abets or is an accomplice in the commission of any act mentioned in clause (1) of this Article or any person who has knowledge of the commission of such act and has failed to report the same shall also be guilty of high treason," Maldivesculture.com reported.

Since there was no legal representation of the defendants in the court and the whole trial was probably planned in advance, there was no way such loopholes in the prosecution could matter.

Maldivesculture.com said that only Mohamed Zaki made any admissions, saying he distributed the newsletter by email from Malaysia to people in Maldives and overseas. The prosecution said that Luthufy made Sandhaanu while in Male' and then e-mailed it to Zaki who e-mailed it to subscribers. The report in Aafathis quoted sources saying that the men were in the process of creating the 9th issue of Sandhaanu when they were arrested.

The four people were not allowed to say anything in self-defense on the day they were sentenced. However, in a previous session Luthufy is said to have asked the judge whether they (the judge and the government officials) had any honor to defend while Luthufy was on trial for charges of defaming the character of senior government officials. 'How can some people who have no honor and good character be defamed?' he asked.

In response to the prosecution's allegations that Luthufy and the others were involved in spreading false rumors and baseless stories Luthufy challenged the prosecution and the judge to bring to the court any issue of Sandhaanu and show him a single story that was false and baseless. He said that he was being prosecuted because he published the stories of high levels of corruption and embezzlement among government officials.

"In a court appearance on 25 June 2002 related to the publication of the Maldivian internet magazine Sandhaanu, Ibrahim Luthfee loudly denied the charges, and insisted that he was prepared to prove every allegation he had made in Sandhaanu regarding Maldives President Gayyoom.

Before this court appearance, sources claim Luthfee and the others were asked to confess and sign a declaration that they had attempted to smear the President. Certain rewards were also offered, they said.

In court, Luthfee challenged the impartiality of the judge and

How producers of Sandhaanu were arrested

It was said that in November 2001 President Gayoom summoned his senior officers of the National Security Service - the government body under which the armed forces, police and coast guard comes - and gave them a warning.

They were warned to find out the creators of the underground publication Sandhaanu. They were cautioned that if they did not find the people responsible, some of the high-ranking officers of the NSS will lose their jobs.

The officers of NSS live a life of luxury and they will resort to any method to preserve this life. Dissidents were worried that NSS will arrest innocent people on charges related to Sandhaanu as a means of buying time till the actual creators were found. For more than three months Sandhaanu was bringing headaches to the leaders of the regime. As Americans were hunting Osama bin Laden in the rough terrain of Afghanistan, all the resources of the government of Maldives were deployed to find an enemy that was as versatile: the creators of Sandhaanu.

Two youngsters, Mushthaq and Musthafa, were arrested first in December 2001. Mushthaq had completed his education in Malaysia and returned in late 2001. Musthafa, after completing part of his education in Malaysia, was finishing his studies in Australia. He came on holiday. They were detained for about two weeks before they were released. They were also said to have been questioned about Dhivehi forum, an online discussion forum which was used by dissidents to post material. Apparently the cops did not find any connection between them and Sandhaanu. However, it was said that the cops made a deal with them, got the passwords of the forum, and now control the forum. It was also said that the arrest of Naushad Waheed, a Maldivian artist, was based on information given by the two youngsters or one of them.

Now we know that not all those rumors were true. It is quite possible that the cops got the password of the Dhivehi forum from the youngsters and now control the forum. However, it was a rumor spread by the regime that Naushad was arrested based on information provided by the young people. In fact Naushad's arrest involved more shadowy details that the government wanted to conceal.

"On the 9th December 2001, 9.30 p.m local time, Naushad Waheed, a prominent artist was arrested and taken away to the NSS along with his PC. Soon after, a change of clothes, etc. were taken in as well, reflecting to the public yet another violent reaction by the authorities to the Sandhaanu affair," MaldivesCulture.com said while reporting the arrest of Naushad.

Growing evidence indicates that Naushad was a double agent who passed information both to the regime and the opposition. It was his connections with the opposition, and according to some people, his passing of information to Amnesty International, which landed him in trouble. He was sent to house arrest in April 2002 and awaits trial. It is clear that he was not involved in Sandhaanu.

In the afternoon of 30 January 2002 NSS Officers conducted a stealth operation in which the offices of Nazaki, a leading business in Maldives, were raided. Mohamed Zaki, one of the shareholders and the leading man in the business, was arrested allegedly while he was at his home in Male' at the same time.

The raid was very discreet and only NSS officers were involved. There was no low-ranking staff for the fear of a leak. Zaki had already escaped the cops once before; this time they were taking no chances.

The police searched the computers and files and other stuff in Nazaki. They also arrested Ismail Zaki, a brother of Mohamed Zaki. Both brothers were involved in the business. Only recently

had Ismail arrived from Malaysia after spending years there with his brother. They had businesses and property in Malaysia.

In a raid that was very coordinated, the Malaysian police raided the house of Zaki in Malaysia simultaneously. A group of Maldivian policemen, led by the Deputy Commissioner of Police Captain Latheef, was already in Malaysia in advance, plotting the raid.

The Malaysian cops searched Zaki's residence and arrested his 16-year-old son, who is said to have been surfing the web when the raid took place. The boy was released on bail and later released. In both Male' and in Malaysia, the police is said to have taken hard disks of computers for examination.

Zaki was a prominent businessman of the Maldives and his arrest was much talked about in town. Nazaki was situated in an area bustling with traders and buyers during daytime and the cops' raid was much noticed by the people. Some people suspected that Zaki's arrest had something to do with his past in which he fled the country and stayed in Malaysia for years after the cops started hunting him in relation to a political case, of which the details are not very clear even now. But for people who were analyzing the recent happenings in the Maldives, the nature of the arrest seemed to be related to the hunt for the publishers of Sandhaanu, the underground publication.

On the morning of 31 January 2002 the office of Viuga, an IT company located in Alikilagefaanu Magu of Male', was raided. Its shareholder and Managing Director Ibrahim Luthufy was arrested along with Sofwath, a young programmer working for the company, and Fathimath Nishreen, a young girl working for the company. Nishreen was released later but was arrested again.

Muaz, another young man who was employed in Viuga, was arrested at his home later. In each case either computers or hard disks were taken to Police Headquarters for investigation.

Ibrahim Luthufy was a creative businessman who in early 1990s organized a computer training centre named Computerland. His business career was interrupted by a long spell of custody, during which time he was either in prison or under house arrest for crimes he did not commit. After he was released in 1999 he formed the IT Company with Qasim Ibrahim, one of the leading businessmen of the Maldives.

About two weeks later Amjad, another shareholder of Viuga, was also arrested. Amjad was no longer involved in the business of Viuga and he had just started his own business. But the fact that he was a shareholder made him a prime target and it was now clear that Viuga, a Dhivehi name which meant Network, was now in deep water.

Shafy, nicknamed DOS, was also a staff of Viuga and was working in an assignment in a resort when the police called him and told him to report to the police station in Male'. Shafy came in his own will and joined his arrested colleagues. There was not much choice.

The plot thickens as Ahmed Ibrahim Didi, a former parliamentary candidate for Addu Atoll, was arrested. It was reported that he was in Sri Lanka for a medical treatment when he was brought back home. Apparently, the government was forming alliances with neighboring countries in their search for the culprits.

For Ahmed Didi, nicknamed Mandela, jail was not a new environment. A dissident and critic, he was imprisoned during a parliamentary election so that he could not conduct his campaign. Like Zimbabwe the regime in Maldives intimidate and bully candidates and even imprison them to ensure that they do not win. Ahmed Didi, who comes from Hulhudhoo in Addu Atoll,

had a high chance of winning a seat in parliament before he was imprisoned during the election.

After conducting the investigation to some extent Ismail Zaki, Amjad, Muaz, Sofwath and Shafy were released. Mohamed Zaki, Ibrahim Luthufy, Ahmed Didi and Nishreen remained in detention till their trial began in June 2002. On 7 July 2002 the three men were sentenced to life imprisonment (25 years) and Nishreen was sentenced to ten years of imprisonment for different levels of involvement in Sandhaanu. The three men received a one-year sentence of banishment for defaming the character of the President and senior government officials and Nishreen received a sentence of one-year of house arrest on similar charges.

Four more people were taken to the police station in late March and early April but were later released. Some of them were detained for a few days and others for about a week. They are Abdul Hannan, shareholder of sign making company Harins, Ahmed Nashid, a shareholder of ADK Hospital in Male', Hassan Zahir, shareholder of Reefside company, and Qasim Ibrahim, majority shareholder of Villa group of companies and one of the richest men in the country. All of them come from the same circle of businessmen who are seen as leading an opposition movement.

Their connection with Sandhaanu is not clear. Nashid, Qasim and Hannan were close to Naushad Waheed who was arrested earlier. Even before Qasim was summoned to the Police Station rumors had spread in Male' that he had financed Sandhaanu. As he had invested in Viuga and was a shareholder it was natural for this rumor to spread but it is not necessarily true. Qasim was also a leading figure in the movement which tried to form a political party in the Maldives.

Qasim and Zahir's passports are said to be confiscated by the police. They have to inform the police and get permission each time they want to travel abroad.

The government's hunt for the creators of Sandhaanu involved a lot of resources. Informers were deployed and paid, cops monitored the coffee and tea shops, e-mail and postal mail was monitored, phones were tapped and the police listened to phone conversations, police teams went to countries where Maldivians visit, and above all, the government hired hackers.

The machinery of the government was in full swing to find out who were involved but the irony is that the Sandhaanu producers were discovered not by these enormous efforts but by the defection and deceit of a single man.

Captain Ahmed Mohamed Didi is the son of Mohamed Didi from Thubbeege house in Hithadhoo island of Addu Atoll. Mohamed Didi filled very high-ranking positions in the administration of Addu Atoll and he holds power and influence in the atoll as well as a close relationship with the senior officials of the government.

Captain Ahmed was a seaman, just in case you might mistake him for an NSS officer. He was the Captain of some ships that Nazaki operated for a long period of time. When Mohamed Zaki's business centered in Malaysia, Captain Ahmed also started spending more and more time in Malaysia. Later, he started his own business in Malaysia.

Apart from his links with Zaki he was also a relative of Ibrahim Luthufy. Hence, it is apparent that they saw him as a trustworthy person to involve in their quest to create an underground newsletter. Sources say that Captain Ahmed wasn't involved in the activity after the idea became a reality but he had enough knowledge of the smooth operation that Zaki and Luthufy were conducting.

Ahmed's brother Ibrahim Mohamed Didi or Ibrahim Didi is an officer of NSS. He joined NSS at a very young age and his rise to officer rank could be seen as phenomenal by some people.

However, the close links between his father and the regime, in fact his father was part of the regime's machinery in Addu Atoll, could be a good explanation. Another well-documented fact is that Ibrahim Didi did an act of bravado and something that the regime has to be grateful for during the unsuccessful coup attempt of 1998 by Tamil mercenaries from Sri Lanka.

The armory of the NSS was locked when the mercenaries attacked at pre-dawn. The keys were with Ilyas Ibrahim, President Gayoom's brother-in-law and the minister who was also in-charge of Ministry of Defense and National Security. Ilyas lived in a house far from the NSS headquarters. Because the mercenaries were on the look out for ministers Ilyas had also to commit some acts of heroism like jumping off rooftops and trees and breaking a few bones to save his life.

When the whole government was paralyzed it was Ibrahim Didi, wearing the uniform of Male' English School as a disguise, who took the keys from Ilyas and tried to take it to the safety of NSS Headquarters. At the time the NSS staff were not allowed to wear plain clothes and their uniform while not on official duty was a white shirt with a black line down the sleeve. It was a dead giveaway and caused the death of some NSS staff during 1988 coup and the dress code was revised later allowing plain clothes.

Ibrahim Didi, in his perfect disguise as a school boy, climbed over the wall of Sakeena Manzil across the street from NSS headquarters and standing in the street threw the keys of the armory with all his might over the wall of NSS Headquarters and into the Headquarters where a number of soldiers were waiting in anxiety without ammunition and weapons. Bravo. The mercenaries were armed and on the streets it was a considerable risk to take. The rest is history. The armory was opened, NSS got weapons and they were able to keep the attackers at bay till the Indian troops arrived for help.

In wars and battles it is such small acts that make a difference between a win and a loss. Like in 'Saving Private Ryan' in which the character of Tom Hanks sacrifices his life to save Private Ryan, some small acts may sound insignificant but may hold a big value and significance in the context of the large battle or war.

You could say history was repeating itself in 2001 and 2002 when Ibrahim Didi came to the rescue of the regime once again, when it was faced not by armed mercenaries but the threat of an email newsletter. It is not clear at which stage Captain Ahmed decided to tell his brother about the operation of Luthufy and Zaki. Both Luthufy and Zaki were close to him and it must be the lure of some good opportunities that must have ticked him.

"NSS sources say an officer Ibrahim Didi personally gave information to President Gayoom about Sandhaanu authors after the officer returned from a holiday in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. His brother Ahmed had been working closely with Ibrahim Luthufy who is also related by blood to Ibrahim Didi," Maldivesculture.com said.

If indeed Ibrahim Didi went to Malaysia during the time he must have told his brother about the nature of his mission and the threat that posed to NSS officers if they did not find out the creators of Sandhaanu before the deadline. Ahmed might have said that he had a clue about who might be the culprits and Ibrahim Didi must have convinced his brother about the potential opportunities they would have if they broke the news. Was Ibrahim Didi acting according to his sworn oath to defend the country and the rulers or were there other motives involved in betraying a relative?

Ibrahim Didi personally told the story to the President and the President was involved in coordinating the raids. Even some of the highest ranking officers were kept in the dark. A group of police officers including Deputy Commissioner of Police Captain Ibrahim Latheef flew to Malaysia to coordinate the raid to Zaki's

Religion and politics mingle in latest arrests in the Maldives

Islamic preacher Ibrahim Fareed was arrested by the police in June. He is still detained.

"Maldivian Islamic preacher Ibrahim Fareed was arrested in Malé on Saturday 8 June at 3.15 p.m. Later, the National Security Service took extra clothes from his house, indicating he will be held for an extended period," Maldivesculture.com said.

Fareed was arrested following a lecture he delivered at Masjid Mohamed bin Abdullah, a recently opened mosque near the New Harbor in the southwestern side of Male'. Maldivesculture.com said that on the night of Friday 7 June, the large crowd at the mosque included NSS officers in plain clothes.

Fareed's popularity as a religious preacher and leader of Friday prayers had risen before his arrest in June. Sources say that a few days before his arrest he was warned about the content of his lectures.

"Several days ago he was summoned by the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs and warned about his lectures which focused on the themes of Islamic behavior and Sharia law. Fareed was warned that his lectures were threatening 'peace and harmony'. In that case, he replied, Prophet Muhammad's words threatened 'peace and harmony'.

Lectures in Maldivian mosques can only be given with the permission of the Supreme Council. These speeches usually occur after the evening prayer. Fareed had received permission, and after this warning he was relegated to the status of reserve speaker, badhalu gai," Maldivesculture.com reported.

This is not first time religious preachers are summoned to the Supreme Council. President Gayoom and his regime uses religion as a tool to attract popularity but different aspects of the religion are always presented to the public in a manner that is favorable to the politics of the regime. Some aspects of Islam are hidden purposefully from the public. Religious preaching is very much controlled and only authorized permission holders could preach because any wrongdoing of the regime should not be illustrated in a religious lecture.

Now and then scholars end up in trouble because they preach to a group without permission. It is a punishable offence to preach without permission and this way the regime could easily arrest and imprison religious factions that are against the establishment. In very rare cases a permitted scholar may also preach in a manner that is not favorable to the politics of the regime. In such situations the scholar may be warned and if there is no change the permission may be withdrawn and will be relegated to lower ranks among scholars.

President Gayoom and some of his ministers were educated at Al-Azhar University in Cairo. They are seen as well-versed in Islam. The other scholars have to be their mouthpieces.

Mohamed Rasheed Ibrahim, the President of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, was a simple man when he returned to Maldives after completing his studies. He had spent a long time abroad. The first lectures that he delivered were very straightforward and did not contain the hypocrisy that is found in religious lectures in Maldives. Today, he is a puppet of the President and his lectures are used for criticizing the opponents of the regime and twisting the Quran and sayings of the Prophet to defend the actions of the regime.

Dr Abdul Majeed who arrived from Saudi Arabia with a PhD was also given a high post at the Supreme Council. Dr Majeed's qualification was higher than the others including the President. People looked forward to him as a man who will be honest and

earnest. He had a long beard. Today his beard is very short. It became short gradually and almost unnoticeably. He resides at the residence of Mohamed Rasheed Ibrahim, the six-storey building described by Sandhaanu as a palace.

It is evident that Dr Majeed's beard was shortened because of pressure. The point here is that his beliefs and everything must have been changed. These are the kind of people the regime wants at the forefront as defenders of the faith. Not people like Ibrahim Fareed.

Fareed is said to belong to a Fuamulaku family living in Kuda Huvadhoo island in Dhaalu Atoll. Fareed is the eldest among the four children of Ahmed Jamal Ali and Hajara Abdul Rahman. However, Fareed's father has four other children from another marriage and hence Fareed is his father's fifth child.

Fareed studied at Mauhad Dhirasathul Islamiyya, a Government Islamic school in Malé. He received a three-year secondary school education scholarship from Qatar before his studies at Mauhad were over. Later he received the opportunity to study for his first degree of Law and Sharia in Qatar. He returned to Maldives after graduation in 1997.

Fareed became famous after he started delivering sermon at Friday prayers. The first sermon he delivered was in the Ramadan of 1412 (December 2000) and this attracted the attention of many people.

"I can remember the Friday Prayer I led in the Islamic Centre. Many people phoned and congratulated me. I thanked everyone," said Fareed," Maldivesculture.com's translation of an article published in Huvaas magazine said. This article, written by Moosa Latheef in the 26 December 2001 issue of Huvaas, was published before Fareed's arrest.

Many people liked the way Fareed delivered the sermon and recited Quran. According to Huvaas, Fareed honed the skills of Quran recitation by listening to the radio while he was a kid. He delivered the sermon very loudly and his style of reading Quran and Hadith is like that of an Arab.

"I try to deliver to the public the message of the Friday prayer sermon in the spirit that it requires, and provide an uplifting feeling to the hearts of the people. A sermon should not be read out as a lesson, or told like a story," said Fareed," Maldivesculture.com's translation of the article in Huvaas said.

Huvaas said that people even used to phone the Supreme Council to find out the mosque where Fareed will be delivering the Friday prayer sermon. A person from the Supreme Council told Huvaas that a sizable number of people used to call the Council to find out where Fareed will be leading Friday prayers and where he will be preaching in evening lectures.

The article in Huvaas also said that Fareed received invitations from all over Maldives and he had visited many islands to deliver religious sermons.

Indeed, Fareed's popularity was rising to phenomenal levels. Mosques were filled when he delivered the evening lectures. People used to stand on the streets near the walls of the mosques. Delegations came from islands requesting Fareed to visit their islands to deliver sermons and lectures. All this had a familiar ring to it. Certain people were concerned about it.

When Maumoon Abdul Gayoom arrived in Maldives after completing his education he was seen as an intelligent, educated man, well-versed in religion. Gayoom and his friends took religion as their main tool to win popularity among Maldivians. He was seen as a religious scholar who could

restore faith in the country. He used to criticize the existing government for its lack of efforts in upholding Islamic values in the country. Gayoom and his friends used to write religious articles in magazines and this became the perfect tool to come to power. After their rise to power they continued to use religion to gain their political ambitions. Now Fareed was giving them a taste of their own medicine.

The current regime always tries to ensure that religious scholars who have any potential of becoming popular are kept under tight control. They are given good positions and other offers. If they are against the regime they could be imprisoned or banished. Sheikh Ahmed Adam is an example of a scholar who had to face the wrath of the regime. In case of Mohamed Rasheed Ibrahim and Dr Majeed they were neutralized easily.

It is obvious that the regime would have regarded the rising popularity of Fareed with concern. Some of the issues Fareed raised in his lectures were against the views of the regime and thus he was summoned to the Supreme Council where he was warned. The fact that he did not budge to the warnings proved that he was a formidable opponent and he must be neutralized using heavy tactics.

Fareed's popularity was also interpreted as an opportunity by some factions in the society. Here was a good candidate who could be attractive to the masses. In the political void created deliberately by the regime, it was rare that such a popular figure is found. Hence, Fareed received backing from different parties. It is clear that by the time he preached at the mosque near New Harbor his confidence must have been boosted from the support by different people.

The groups that supported Fareed worked hard to attract people to the lecture held at the mosque near New Harbor. People were informed in advance. As a result the mosque, which is quite large, was filled. There is a narrow lane in front of the mosque and it was also filled. Near the mosque and across the road there is a low wall next to the cafés near the New Harbor and people were sitting on this wall. The loudspeakers of the mosque were quite powerful and people came to the mosque from a distance attracted by Fareed's voice.

It is clear that Fareed's lecture that evening was very political. It is also clear that he was arrested for those political elements in his lecture.

In his lecture Fareed criticized the people for sacrificing their prayers in favor of watching World Cup soccer matches. He implied that such things should not happen in a 100 percent Muslim country, and hence implied that the government was not able to or was not enforcing religion in the Maldives. The government's television station TVM (the only TV station in Maldives) had stated that the sponsorship of matches were not enough to meet the costs involved in telecasting the matches and about 70% of the costs were borne by the government because the President did not wish the Maldivians being deprived of the opportunity to watch the matches. This was a PR stunt as the presidential election is to be held in 2003. Maldivians are soccer-crazy and by saying it was the President who made it possible for the people to see the World Cup matches was meant to increase Gayoom's popularity. This obvious PR stunt was jeered by many people.

Fareed also criticized an article in a local tabloid that had the headline 'Why cucumbers are better than men? (for women)'. He used this as an example of how low the quality of journalism has gone. During the last few years a number of tabloids have mushroomed in the Maldives and some of them published articles that had no ethical or moral value. Some of the tabloids are owned by ministers. For example, Adduvas, a tabloid that published an interview of the President as a PR stunt, is controlled by Ibrahim Maniku (samarey), the brother-in-law of the First Lady. Ibrahim Maniku is also the Minister of Information, Arts and Culture.

Fareed also expressed dissatisfaction over mingling of both sexes in billiards clubs of Male'. Powerful men have shares in those clubs. Abdullah Shahid, Executive Secretary of the President is rumored to have shares in City Billiards Club (CBC). Nobody knows why a large building was given without a bidding process to the current owners of Godown club in Maafannu area of Male'. Minister of Construction and Public Works Umar Zahir may be involved. None of the two clubs mentioned here offer any real chance for males and females to engage in dirty acts. However, a dance is organized every month in Godown.

Fareed's criticism of the clubs may sound too conservative to some people, but an interesting thing is Gayoom used to criticize the clubs that were in Male', such as Hakuraa Fair, before he came to power. He viewed them as being against religion. Today, he is allowing the very same thing to go on, while the critic ends up in jail. Just about hundred meters away from the mosque where Fareed delivered the historic lecture is the stage where Weekend music shows Hafuthaa Nimum is held. These shows are not held regularly; they are organized whenever the regime wants to divert the attention of the people away from their problems and immerse them in entertainment. Tasteless bands play songs copied from Hindi songs while a female dancer called Suneetha may dance equally badly. Even the most pious people in the mosque will find a hard time to concentrate on prayers with the loud music blaring.

Fareed also said that in case of No Flying Zones, No Parking Zones and No Entry points if a violation occurs the penalty will come from 'the King'. He said, however, that if the people violate the orders of the religion then the penalty will come from God. After pointing out subtly that 'King' is inferior than God he also subtly pointed out that in Islam the people have to obey rulers only as long as they do not violate the religious principles. Here he was challenging the authority of the 'King' and making the people aware that they do not have to obey a regime that is not safeguarding the religion.

Fareed also said that the people have to obey no creature in an act of disobedience to God. He said, however, the people have to obey rulers and scholars in other circumstances. He added that the people who calls for the correct way will be wronged, jailed and punished. But God will ultimately save them from their miseries, he said. He also called upon Maldivians to fear nobody other than God. Here also he was implying that people have to obey rulers only if they guide to the correct way and was implying that the people should not fear the authoritarian regime. In a way he was challenging the divine theory of rule which some Maldivians believe to some extent.

After Fareed's arrest people somehow got copies of his lecture and this was transferred into MP3 format and distributed on CDs. The CDs were not distributed on a scale equal to Ayatollah Khomeini's tapes that were distributed in Iran while he was in France, but nevertheless this proved that Fareed was still a threat even after his arrest. It was time to crackdown on Fareed's supporters.

Haveeru daily reported on 11 July 2002 that five men were arrested by police for dropping pamphlets on streets of Male' with the intention of spreading Christianity. At a press conference, Assistant Police Commissioner Major Ibrahim Latheef told the press that the five men were arrested on 15 June 2002 in an investigation prompted by information the police had received.

"Arrested for the alleged offence of dropping pamphlets on the street, were Mohamed Fauzi, 34, of Gulbakaage house, Viligili island, Gaaf Alif atoll; Mohamed Shaz Valeed, 31, of Meadow house Galolhu ward Malé island ; Abdullah Fayaz, 26, of Fodhdhooge house Henveiru ward Malé; Mohamed Suwaiz, 22, of Tharaboozuge house Henveiru ward Malé; and Mohamed Amir, 34, of Nasha house Henveiru ward Malé," read Maldivesculture.com's translation of the news reported in Haveeru by Ismail Rasheed.

Latheef told the media that the five men had admitted to preparing the pamphlets and dropping them on streets of Male'. Haveeru also reported that Latheef said that Fauzy was the leader and the rest were involved in varying degrees.

Concerning the content of the pamphlets Latheef said that they contained information about Christianity and benefits of that religion. He told that the police caught one of the men while he was dropping the pamphlets on streets. He added the matter was under investigation and further details will be disclosed later.

Mohamed Fauzi is one of the founder members of Noorul Quran, a chain of centers where Quran is taught. The centers have been established in Male' for a long time and many parents take their kids to the centers. The news that one of the founders of such a centre had been arrested for dropping pamphlets encouraging Christianity was very shocking. Were they really Christian missionaries under the disguise of teachers of Quran? Or was there anything more sinister going on?

The doubts in the minds of the public prompted the police to organize a second news conference in which the police showed the media what had been produced and dropped allegedly by Fauzi and his friends.

Under the headline 'Police checking whether pamphlets recently dropped on streets of Male' about Christianity has gone to atolls' Aafathis reported on 16 July 2002 that the police were checking whether the pamphlets had gone to atolls. Major Ibrahim Latheef told reporters that the police were checking that through police based in atolls and that so far the pamphlets were discovered only in Male'.

In the news reported by Moonisa Easa in Aafathis it was also said that the police showed the reporters some of the pamphlets dropped by the men. The police headquarters told the reporters that the pamphlets were being shown to them because the public were asking the police about the content and nature of the pamphlets. The news article said the pamphlets contained information on Christianity and text that encouraged people to convert to Christianity. The police said that such text that encouraged people to convert to Christianity could not be made public. The police added that in addition to what was being shown to the media the five men dropped other pamphlets too.

Latheef said that the five men were arrested on the night of 15 June while the police were on the look out for the people who were dropping the pamphlets. Latheef said one of the five men was arrested while he was dropping the pamphlets. He added that the lead role was played by Mohamed Fauzi, founder of Noorul Quran, and that he had admitted in investigation that he played the lead role in that. Latheef told the press that the other four men had also admitted their involvement and that all of them were very close to Fauzi and were linked to Noorul Quran in different ways. The police also informed that the pamphlets were photocopied using a copier in Noorul Quran and Fauzi had admitted even to that.

Latheef said that the men were arrested about one and a half month after they started dropping the pamphlets. According to the police the men had dropped a very substantial number of pamphlets before they were arrested. The police said that the men had dropped more than 150 pamphlets on streets of Male' and that some of the pamphlets came to the police through public.

The police headquarters said that no links had been established between the five men and any group of people who tried to spread Christianity in the Maldives previously. The police added that the five men had no previous criminal records.

The police gathered the media and showed them the pamphlets allegedly distributed by the people because few people believed the story in the first place that the men had dropped such pamphlets. People who knew Fauzi did not believe that he

would have done such a thing. People who knew the other four people also said that they would not have done that. People who knew the men agreed that they might have dropped something political but nothing that encourages Christianity.

Some of the people who were arrested were already in bad books of the regime. Abdullah Fayaz had worked in the Presidential Palace as an engineer. Because of his religious stand - he grew a long beard and his trousers were rolled up to ankles - he was asked to change that. He did not abide and he was transferred to Ministry of Construction and Public Works.

In some government offices the people who are having long beards and have trousers rolled up are being forced to quit their jobs. There have been reports of a few incidents like that happening in State Trading Organization (STO). Fayaz must have committed a grave sin because in Presidential Palace not to yield to orders means challenging the authority of the President himself.

Mohamed Shaz Valeed already had a record. He had spent sometime in jail during 1990s and in every time of political instability he is closely watched by the police.

According to the police the men were apprehended one and half months after they started dropping the pamphlets. If such a thing had really happened some people in Male' would have seen and read those pamphlets. The police also said that they received some of the pamphlets from members of the public. However, there is nobody who has seen or read the pamphlets. It is unbelievable that in a small place such as Male' such a thing would have happened and nobody talks about it before the police breaks the news. Male' is a harbor to all sorts of rumors and even the most tightly guarded secrets are out open and discussed down the grapevine.

Sources say that the government gave a computer to Noorul Quran and on the grounds that this was a form of assistance asked Noorul Quran to submit its financial details and accounts to the government. All schools and training centers that are assisted by the government have to submit reports to the government. Sources also say that a few weeks before Fauzi's arrest he was summoned to Ministry of Education and asked whether Noorul Quran had any links with Islamic extremists. These are early warning signs that the regime had already picked Noorul Quran as a target.

Some people say that Fauzi went to the Supreme Council with a book that encourages Christianity and asked why they could not prevent such things. An official from the Supreme Council then told him that they are waiting to catch the people red-handed. Another version of this story says that a student passed the book to Fareed and he then gave it to Fauzi.

It is very probable that a book that is about Christianity is found in Male' but there is no evidence that pamphlets were dropped on to streets by any group of people. The regime is using this excuse to reduce the credibility of Fauzi and his friends. Maldivians are traditionally religious people and any act that is undermining the integrity of religion will be viewed with hostility by the public. The regime's intention was to portray Fauzi and his friends as hypocrites who are spreading Christianity under the guise of Quran teachers. This time the public did not buy the story.

In a speech President Gayoom gave this year on the occasion of anniversary of the birth of Prophet Muhammad he echoed the threat of Christian indoctrination. He said that foreign organizations were giving free education and medical care to Maldivians living abroad as a part of calculated strategy to force the doctrine of Christianity on Maldivians. He claimed that he had knowledge about the organizations and added that they had a lot of money at their disposal.

""The facts of offering free education to children, giving free medical care and any other kinds of help are just part of a very

Crackdown reaches secondary schools

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The content of his essay is not clear. It was reported in Maldivesculture.com that he wrote saying that the arrest, detention and sentencing of his uncle Ibrahim Luthufy was unfair. Luthufy is now serving a life sentence for his involvement in Sandhaanu newsletter.

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According to Maldivesculture.com the Assistant Principal Shareef reported the matter to the police. "The NSS cautioned Usaid and asked him to return the following day with a letter of apology. Next day, 28 July 2002 at 1.20 p.m. accompanied by his father, Ali Haneef, Usaid Haneef arrived at NSS headquarters in Malé. Ali Haneef was asked to return with a change of clothes for his son. Usaid is now believed to be at the Maafushi island detention centre. There have been no formal charges, and no media coverage of these events within Maldives," Maldivesculture.com reported.

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About two weeks later Usaid was released from detention and sent home. He was cautioned not to repeat such an act.

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Another interesting development that occurred recently in Dharumavantha School is the loss of some chemicals from the science laboratory. Some young boys have been arrested regarding this. The police investigated the matter vigorously because they suspected the chemicals could be used for making explosives. Only very young boys were arrested, including the son of an NSS officer Major Faruhath Shaheer, but the police are not ruling out any possibilities. President Gayoom has postponed the official opening of the school because of the fear of a bomb blast. Rumors say that literature that instructs how to make bombs were found with the boys.

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Parenolia of regime reaches unprecedented levels

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Recently a young boy was arrested for riding in front of the new President's Office a couple of times. Sources say that after the boy passed in front of the President's Office he found the road blocked. Unfortunately he had to pass in front of the President's Office again. He was arrested because the security unit inside the office thought he was a security threat. The poor boy was released later.

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Security at the President's Office, which was built using millions of Rufiya from tax payers money, is very tight. Powerful cameras are used to scan the entire area around the building. Please do not make the foolish mistake of passing by too many times at a given time.

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