

Newsletter

Maldivian Democratic Party

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A Tale of Two Islands

President Rene of the Seychelles, a country of 67,000 people, has handed over the reins of power to his vice president James Michel. Mr. Rene finally did this after 27 years of power. To the north of the Seychelles lies another chain of islands, the Maldives, a country of 315,000 people. President Gayoom of the Maldives has been in power for the last 26 years.

In the early 1990's Mr. Rene had to face a barrage of internal and external pressure. His human rights record was pathetic. He had to make progress on political issues. On December 1991 Mr. Rene announced that political groupings of 100 members would be permitted to register and that multiparty elections for a commission to participate in drafting a new constitution would be held six months later.

In so many ways the recent political history of Seychelles is relevant to the Maldives and the Indian Ocean. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and a movement towards multiparty systems in Africa left Seychelles out of step with the regional trends of the early 90's. When Britain and France trimmed their foreign aid programmes and tied further aid to progress on the political issues, domestic opposition to Mr. Rene's ways and methods multiplied and those in exile received a new lease on life. Mr. Rene finally relented and allowed multiparty democracy.

As Mr. Rene departs, for those of us in the Maldivian Democratic Party, working from exile in London and Colombo, it's not exactly comforting to know that Gerard Hoarau, Seychellois exile leader, was assassinated in London in 1985. Neither is it sweet music to hear the menacing from threats of presidential advisors to set the goons on MDP. They need to understand that the

condition of exile is a one way ticket. MDP cannot relent until and unless it gets its return ticket of pluralistic democracy in the Maldives.

The inner movers and shakers of the government of the Maldives remain stubbornly resolved not to let multiparty democracy take root in the Maldives. In 1993 when multiparty rule was reintroduced to Seychelles most of Mr. Gayoom's jails were packed with political dissidents. Writers, artists,



academics and actually anyone worth their salt were inside. In 1995 when another request for the registration of a political party was made, Mr. Gayoom's government immediately arrested and ill-treated highly respected elders of the Maldivian society who supported the introduction of multi party democracy. With no meaningful support from the international community the government of the Maldives continued business as usual. In 2001, when the Maldivian Democratic Party attempted registration citing Article 27 of the Constitution of the Maldives which grants the right of freedom of association to its citizens, Mr. Gayoom evaded his presidential obligations and palmed the issue to his rubber stamp parliament. Always looking for a justification to wave at the international community, with the vote in the parliament Gayoom was armed. His wife went on Sri-Lankan television and said that it was not her husband but the parliament that decided against multi party rule.

Since the uprising and civil disturbances of September 2003 Mr. Gayoom's ways and methods became more exposed to the international community. In his effort to wiggle out of this exposure, as before, Mr. Gayoom has been setting up cosmetic commissions and giving lip service to political reform. Senior Ministers of the regime has been informing foreign diplomats and the international media that the question of legitimizing political parties remains pending as a constitutional reform process is underway.

If we are to see lasting and peaceful change in the Maldives, a necessary first step would of course be the Seychellois blue print. Parties first and then, followed by constitutional amendments later. The present constitution of the Maldives is not even four years old and now Mr. Gayoom feels that it is not working and needs amending. The fact that Mr. Gayoom has not felt the need to include other political groupings in the amendment of the constitution is the best indicator of his intentions. It's a game of double deception. The government has pre-empted any call for multi party democracy by calling for the amendment of the Constitution. The present ultra conservative ruling elite in the Maldives will pack the constitution amending Majlis, for which elections have been called. The process has begun. MDP's strongest candidates are unable to seek election for the Special Majlis as they remain in limbo with terrorism charges hanging over them. This new Majlis can come out with a document that will remove any possible resemblance of pluralism in the constitution, so that the First Lady can again claim that "its not my husband".

What's next

After a brief period of turbulence, the government of Maumoon Abdul Gayoom seems to be as entrenched as ever. This shouldn't come as a surprise to those who closely watch the political situation in Maldives. For obvious reasons Gayoom survives all scandals, protests and opposition. A new generation of youth opposition seems to be subdued with intimidation and political suppression.

Gayoom is likely to remain in power until the next election unless he is either too sick or is forced out before that. The latter seems unlikely. The opposition must therefore brace itself for the next presidential election when Gayoom is likely to face credible opposition. He is unlikely to stand for election unless he is sure to win.

Part of the preparation for the next presidential election is to win seats in Parliament, as it is the parliament that really elects the President. As the only formal opposition to the government, MDP should put up candidates for the up coming general election. As usual, the government will put up their candidates including members of the cabinet and will use their executive powers to influence the outcome of the elections.

As a young political party fighting an uphill battle MDP has made remarkable progress. It has gained the recognition of several foreign governments, international human rights organisations and other civil society organisations. Most importantly, it remains as the only voice for democracy in the country. MDP is still in its infancy. But it will grow in membership and its activities, thereby gaining even more recognition worldwide. It will become an unbeatable force in Maldives politics because it is the only organisation that is based on selfless commitment to the civil and political rights of the people. MDP will continue to remain the conscience of the people and the formal opposition. It will continue to build its grassroots support.

Gayoom's regime is on the decline and its days are numbered. The international community has a responsibility for human rights where ever they are violated. Instability in one part of the globe will affect other parts of it. Desperate people whether they are on the side of the government or in the opposition can resort to desperate actions. South Asia doesn't need another hotspot, nor does it need a little despot to shame the world's biggest democracy

Gayoom on Reverse Gear

There is much speculation on the Internet about Gayoom's reform agenda being stuck on reverse gear. My question is: was it ever on any other gear? I think not. To be sure he does make shrill noises about reform. However, a high-pitched cacophony seems to be the beginning and end of Gayoom's reform.

Following the torture/murder of unarmed prisoners by his NSS, Gayoom made some deafening – though predictable – noise about reform. Things are now quieter on the reform front. Gayoom, however, has his foot pressed firmly on the accelerator, as he clumsily takes the nation on a ride on reverse gear. His two commissions – the Sattar Commission and the

Human Rights Commission of Maldives (HCRM) – are good examples of Gayoom's backsliding.

Gayoom's knee-jerk reaction to the killing of prisoners was predictable. He first lied to the nation by claiming his NSS had no choice but to kill the unarmed prisoners. When he realized this lie was too outrageous, even by his standard, he opted to put a brave front by appointing a commission of investigation – under his control, of course. When he got the commission report he went full throttle on reverse gear, sanitizing and editing the report to ensure that he and senior officials close to him are not implicated.

Reinstated Head Torturer Adam Zahir's clandestine meetings and Gayoom's orchestration of the court case, indicate that even the scapegoats on trial will get off lightly. Whatever sentence Gayoom instructs his judges to pass, one thing is definite: justice will not be served. Gayoom and senior officials close to him will remain above the law, buffeted and protected.

The creation of HCRM is the showpiece in Gayoom's reform agenda – proof to the international community, and skeptics at home, of his commitments to reform. Unfortunately, from the institution's inception, Gayoom has been backsliding

and renegeing on his promises. Gayoom's human rights bill falls short of even the minimum requirements for a national human rights institution stipulated in the Paris Principles, earlier championed by him. However, even this watered-down bill was much too liberal for the hardliners in Gayoom's cabinet. The bill has been sent to a committee, thereby effectively killing it.

Judging by past experience, the institution would emerge as yet another tool in Gayoom's hands to whitewash his abuse of people's rights. The HCRM is yet another example of Gayoom's backsliding while simultaneously pretending to move forward.

Gayoom does understand it would take "fresh ideas and new thoughts" to institute reform. Yet he chooses to depend on the same old staid hardliners with their stale ideas and repressive thoughts

Reneging on promises of political reform is nothing new to Gayoom. He did so following the 1988 PLOTE coup attempt. His hardline advisors (the very same who advice him even now) made sure that the reform efforts were short-lived. For example, independent weeklies such as Sangu, Hukuru and Manthiri that flourished during the brief period of media reform were shut-down within a few months. Reformist Majlis members were jailed, harassed, forced to resign or were co-opted by Gayoom within a few short months. Thus ended Gayoom's brief flirtation with reform in 1990. Present attempts are heading in the same direction.

Gayoom does understand it would take "fresh ideas and new thoughts" to institute reform. Yet he chooses to depend on the same old staid hardliners with their stale ideas and repressive thoughts, to be the vanguard of his reform movement – knowing full well they can only take the country backwards on reverse gear. Said Gayoom in 1990, "The Maldivian people need to begin a new era of democracy, and for this fresh ideas and new thoughts are in demand". True. The Maldivian people are still waiting patiently, Mr. President.

Letters

G-speak : Newspeak

Gayoom once said "Legitimate struggles against oppressive regimes have a habit of becoming a means to further selfish ambitions". This was while he was struggling to attain power. Years have passed and one sincerely wonders if he was describing his own desires, ambitions and methods. In 27 years of Presidency, he is far from institutionalizing his promises of a free country. Rather, he created a police-state, where the dynamics of society works only to fulfill the naked ambitions of the ruling class: the family of Gayoom.

"Political ambition" has become pejorative. With organized election-rigging taking place in every Atoll, the "ruling class" is pre-determined. The population looks with suspicion toward anybody with political ambitions. This works relatively well for the ruling class. Censorship and propaganda is effectively used to control and stabilize the frame of mind of the public. While the media is owned by ministers, or directly controlled by the government, Mr. Gayoom runs his own underground rumour-mill, to fabricate illusory hopes and dreams. On 20th September while there were riots on the streets of Male', none of the media reported that any such events took place.

The only "significant" event reported on that day was that of a swimming competition.

Meanwhile, on February 14th the Minister of Information goes on national TV to describe MDP as a terrorist organization. Several other forms of social engineering are regularly applied to the public, to create hopes and dreams. Grand, ambitious projects are cleverly advertised and over the years, dissolves as money into the pockets of ministers. Maafilaafushi, and Villingili are too such projects. None of them ever achieved their real goals and nobody knows where the funds for these projects went. Nobody seems to be responsible for any of these failures.

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Uninvited questions from the international media and human rights organizations are kept at bay with carefully orchestrated events, such as the formation of a "Human Rights Commission", and the promise of adoption of certain human rights articles. For proof that this is just empty rhetoric one need not look further than Gayoom's previous, Anti-Corruption Board. Such make-believe commissions have achieved nothing but the harassment of the people

who gullibly submit their worries to these commissions.

A new word (Kaarizaa) for the word 'disaster', during the Thindhoo boat tragedy, which makes one speculate whether this is a covert form of George Orwell's Newspeak being applied. In Gayoom's media spinning, violence is deliberately unleashed to let people crave for law and order. During the post September 20th period, the population of Male' was cleverly exposed to violence, with the release of hundreds of brown sugar addicts with out any form of rehabilitation. Male' experienced a spike in the increase of daily reports of crime. The hanging of boards on every major corner of Male' with the words "Peace,

Development of the Country", gives the careful observer a notion that the government is trying to create a synonym between "peace" and "submission to the will of the ruling family", together with an "or else" situation of violence. This single theme, of "peace equals submission to me", has been continuously repeated over the years on national media to create an individual who is incapable of deciding the difference between these two concepts. A homogenous society which repeats "yes sir", "yes sir". One wonders whether he, Gayoom, himself is enjoying this dark fetish.

TRIAL AGAINST PERSONS ACCUSED UNDER TERRORISM ACT OF MALDIVES

A Haveru newspaper reporter said that whatever they jot down of the court session is severely scrutinised, censored and stamped by the authorities before they are allowed to take their notes out of the courtroom. They can only write an established amount of "fact" which is circulated to all the newspapers in Male'. So their actual presence in the courtroom is just a farce! Even we, the audience, are fleeced with a metal detector after we go through an electronic doorway. We also have to leave all our belongings, except the clothes we wear, with the officials.

On 9 March 2004 the first hearing of the trial against 6 people charged by the State with carrying out the disturbances in Male' on 20 September 2003, following the incidents of deaths of inmates at the hands of the police at Kaafu Maafushi Jail, took place at a session conducted under the Criminal Court of the Maldives at Dharubaaruge', Faashanaa Maalam.

The 6 people were charged under Article 2 (f) and (g) of the Anti-Terrorism Act of the Maldives. The State proposed to establish the degree of responsibility on and the amount of compensation to be paid by the 6 defendants pertaining to the acts committed on 20 September 2004 which caused damage to government and public property.

Defendant No 1: Mr. Ahmed Zia Abbas (Zia), M. Silver Cloud, 34 yrs

A nephew of the First Lady, he is the son of the First Lady's brother Mr. Abbas Ibrahim, who is the President of the National Centre for Linguistics and Historical Research.

Mr. Ahmed Zia Abbas was not present at the hearing. His lawyer Mr. Ibrahim Nasir Mohamed requested that Mr. Abbas's hearing be postponed as he was undergoing medical treatment abroad and presented documents supporting his request which was granted by the judge Mr. Mukhthaaz Fahmy.

Defendant No 2: Mr. Abdullah Alexander Nasheed (Alec), M. Arrow Villa, 23 yrs

On 20 September 2003 Mr. Nasheed had been in Male' for his medicals. He had been serving a sentence at Maafushi jail. After the day's incidents Mr. Nasheed was accused of causing trouble on that day and he had signed a confession thinking that it would not make much of a difference since he was already under imprisonment. Soon after he had signed it he was pardoned by the President and released. Before his release he was told that if he stayed out of trouble no charge would be brought against him and that he would be deported to the Netherlands. Mr. Nasheed holds a Netherlands passport since he had lived there for 12 years with his father who is married to a Dutch woman. Mr. Nasheed also holds a Maldivian passport.

In court, Mr. Nasheed denied the charges brought against him. The State prosecutor Mr. Mohamed Nashid proceeded to read out the statement Mr. Nasheed had signed under interrogation and reiterated that the statement and accounts of various witnesses were testimony to his guilt. The witnesses were not presented at the hearing nor were their names read out. The State prosecutor also said that fortunately the police had used tear gas that day preventing Mr. Nasheed from carrying out further acts of violence.

Mr. Nasheed denied that he could be categorized as a terrorist since some of his actions read out from his statement belied the charge, such as:

1. Mr. Nasheed claimed that the IGM Hospital where the inmates who had been shot were being treated had been cordoned off by the police who prevented people from entering. Thus he had armed himself with a piece of wood that had nails driven into it which he had removed before proceeding. He said that if his intention had been to harm anyone he would not have removed the nails. He had taken this precaution because his intention had not been to terrorize anyone.

2. Mr. Nasheed indicated towards himself and asked the court how he could possibly have overturned not one but three police vehicles as claimed in the statement.

Mr. Nasheed asked the judge for justice and a fair verdict.

Mr. Ahmed Moosa (Jordan), M. Hathikandu, 18 yrs

He looked all his 18 years of age.

Mr. Moosa pleaded guilty. He seemed not to really know or care what was going on since an open trial is something that Maldivians are not really familiar with. Neither have they learned to put their faith in it. He did not ask for his signed statement to be read out. Neither did he ask for any detailed proof or evidence against himself. He just accepted that whatever could have been claimed against him was true. It was almost as though he was accepting the incriminatory acts contended in the statement against Mr. Nasheed. He added that he had set fire to and vandalized government property held by the police.

Mr. Abdullah Shabeer (Shabeer), Seenu, Hulhudhoo, Welcome Villa, 21 yrs

Mr. Shabeer also looked extremely young. He is already serving a sentence in jail.

Mr. Shabeer also accepted that he had committed incriminatory acts that day but he denied it was in any way to terrorize the general public. He told the court that he had carried out his actions only against the State police because they had become too highhanded and a nuisance to society at large. He also stated that he had put out the fire which was burning some of the police vehicles and had taken a number of such actions that he would not have carried out had his intentions been to terrorize. He said that he had not brought harm to private property and had it been his intention to terrorise the public he could have set fire to the Presidential Palace or done a number of other such things.

Mr. Iqleel Ibrahim (Iqul), Gaafu Alifu, Kanduhulhudhoo, Vidhaa Thari, 22 yrs

Mr. Ibrahim denied the charges outright. He demanded to know what was in his statement because he had not signed anything that could prove him guilty of any acts of violence. He claimed that he had not set fire to or vandalized any property, but he had been present in a number of places that day where the incidents had taken place. He asserted that he had seen a whole lot of people like himself that day who had gone there to see what was happening but that he did not see them in court today being accused of anything.

The State prosecutor claimed that some photographs testified that Mr. Ibrahim had set fire to some motorcycles that were near the Coast Guard Building and reiterated that the charges against Mr. Ibrahim were proven by the accounts of various witnesses. He named 2 witnesses, one of whom was one of the accused Mr. Abdullah Alexander Nasheed. The testimonies of the witnesses were not presented in court. The referred to photographs were also not presented in court.

Mr. Ibrahim said that it was against Islamic jurisprudence to accept the evidence given by a man accused of a crime. He admitted that he had shouted and screamed that day but had not performed any acts of violence neither had he terrorized anyone and if that had been his intention he could have conducted robbery, harmed people or roamed the streets causing havoc. He claimed that he had been just a spectator. And referring to one incident read out by the State prosecutor where he had been accused of telling a police officer to leave IGM Hospital and go because the rioting could not be stopped and the officer might sustain an injury, Mr. Ibrahim said that he would not have said that to the officer if he had been trying to terrorise anyone. He had told the officer to leave because a riot against the police were taking place and there was no telling what the rioters would do to a lone police officer if they got their hands on him. He also ridiculed the fact that anyone could possibly believe that such destruction as claimed by the State prosecution could have been wrought by the mere 6 defendants present that day. Once again he vehemently denied the charges brought against him. He also asked the judge for justice to be served.

Ms. Jennifer Latheef (Jenny), M. Chandhanee Villa, 30 yrs

Eldest child of one of the leading personalities, in exile, of the Maldives Democratic Party (MDP) which is banned in the Maldives. Ms. Latheef was released from police custody after telling her there were no charges being brought against her. But when

she tried to fly to Sri Lanka she was barred from doing so and told she was under restraining orders and she would not be able to leave the Maldives without special permission. She had to get special travel documents to leave the country to go for her medicals. Her passport has been confiscated by the government. Ms. Latheef did not know she was being charged with anything, much less terrorism, until she heard it on public media. She was not informed of it before it was publicly announced. Ms. Latheef had told the other persons accused alongside her to get the assistance of lawyers but they had dismissed her advice saying that it would not make any difference since they would be sentenced anyway. Also that they did not have the money to get a lawyer in the first place and it would be a waste of their parents' hard earned money anyway.

Ms. Latheef told the court that on 20 September 2003 she had attended the funeral of Mr. Evan Naseem who had been inhumanely tortured to death while in Maafushi Jail. She had also gone to the IGM Hospital to try and visit the boys who had been shot inhumanely by the police also in jail and she did not go there to commit any inhumane acts herself. She also claimed not to know why she had been brought to this hearing in the first place.

The State prosecutor presented the statement signed by Ms. Latheef while in police custody. He also presented to the judge some colour photographs of Ms. Latheef that apparently proved her guilt, made from a video by a private individual who had requested anonymity in court. He requested of the judge that the photographs be classified as confidential material. And said that he would in the near future try and obtain and present the judge with the video clippings from which the photographs had originated. He also read out the names of 6 witnesses ready to testify against Ms. Latheef one of whom, a police officer, claimed that he had sustained a leg injury due to a stone thrown at him by Ms. Latheef. Their testimony was not presented in court.

Ms. Latheef's attorney, Mr. Ahmed Muizzu first asked the State prosecution whether the investigation of the case had been brought to a close. The State prosecutor replied that those whose investigations had been completed would be presented in court as they finished, but that the investigation of the entire case was still incomplete.

Then Mr. Muizzu asked the judge for a postponement of the hearings against his client until the investigations of the case had been completed due to the legal problems that might arise out of it if verdict was passed against some of the accused before the investigation of the others were even completed. He also asked the State prosecutor for details of Ms. Latheef's involvement in the case claiming that the charges against her were not specific enough. And also what degree of compensation for which of her alleged actions the State was claiming against her. Mr. Muizzu stated that it would be extremely difficult to present a case based on allegations the State prosecutor might have in his own mind against Ms. Latheef. Mr. Muizzu told the court that any incriminating material had to be shared with the defence since it was an open court and no evidence could be kept from the defence or the court as confidential material. He also asked for copies of Presidential notifications on sections of the Anti-Terrorism Act under which his client was being charged. These are such notifications that are circulated in order to bring further clarification or explanation pertaining to various Laws and Acts. He also presented names of 6 witnesses who would attest to Ms. Latheef's movements on 20 September and disclaim any charges the State might specify against her.

The Judge then quite abruptly adjourned court until further notice.

One had the feeling that the whole scenario had been set up for the benefit of prosecuting Ms. Jennifer Latheef only, since the State prosecution seemed to have prepared a more thorough case, with more "evidence" and more "witnesses", against her than anyone else!

The third and fifth hearing of Jenny's Trial, as I'd like to term it henceforth since all of the State Prosecution's energy and resources are aimed full force in trying to somehow catch Jenny out in particular, saw the presentation of the prosecution's evidence and witnesses against Jenny. By the way, during the fourth hearing Jenny simply beautified the proceedings with her presence and came back since it dealt with others accused alongside her.

1. Witness number 1: a police officer whose evidence apparently corroborated the photos presented in court that day. However, both put together proved to produce the exact opposite effect. The witness claimed under oath that he heard exactly the amount, decibel level and expression in the words of encouragement issuing forth from Jenny's mouth that fateful day in September 2003, encouraging the surging mass of youth surrounding her to wreck destruction against anything moving or otherwise related to the state police.

Sadly, the photographs showed a calm and subdued Jenny conversing with her friends. And another of her walking along the streets of Male', which did not clearly establish either the place, time, or date of event.

Jenny's Lawyer Shaheen Hameed put two and two together and sadly came out scratching his head with a miserable minus one. I don't think even he fathomed the degree of lie the State could conjure up inside its courtrooms. To bring a person to trial without any evidentiary support against that person solely for the sake of taking out a personal grudge would be hard to digest for anyone with any sense of justice who is willing to seek the reality all of us Maldivians are so indifferent towards.

Shaheen Hameed contested the validity of using the photographs in the courtroom as evidence without the presence of the person who took them. Apparently, a person who wished to remain anonymous took a video that day which was made into still photographs and then printed as evidence. This long process itself lost the argument in favour of the validity of the photographs or stills or whatever one can call them. Also not all of the photographs had Jenny in them and most of them had been tempered with to hide the identity of other people at the scene. All in all not fit to even dress up as evidence.

Shaheen contested the validity of the police officer's evidence against Jenny on the grounds that he had not been wearing a uniform that day and had in fact been identified, during the police investigations of other witnesses, as one of the many who had thrown stones at police property!

2. Witness Number 2: He swore that he had seen Jenny, from a distance of 150ft. approximately, throwing stones at police officers. Then the prosecutor read out the statement he had given to the police prior to the trial. And he swore that the statement he had given to the police against Jenny was his, was true, and was given with his consent, in which however he had never stated that he had seen Jenny actually throwing stones but that she had been present at the scene. Either he had been pressurised into making a complete ass of himself or he is very much indebted to the government because his account at court and his account given prior to the trial differed on the most vital of points. At the end of the cross examination he faltered and claimed that he was not absolutely sure he saw Jenny throwing stones because she was amongst a lot of other people.

Shaheen also established that his credibility was questionable since he had been sacked from government employment due to a reason that was at the least shady, since he claimed that he could not remember the details of his removal from the post. Apparently it had to do with theft and still owed the government some money.

3. Witness Number 3: A young police officer. He swore that Jenny had told him to leave the scene of the riot otherwise he might sustain an injury himself. He had walked back to his squad and before he could fall in line a stone hit on his leg, which someone later told him was thrown by Jenny. He also swore that the statement given by him to the police was true. But in that statement he had claimed that he had seen Jenny throwing the stone which injured him. Again the discrepancies between the two statements! Shaheen asked the judge for a chance to cross examine him at a later date if required.

The prosecution rested their case.

27th April 2004 is the sixth session of Jenny's Trial in which Jenny's defence will begin.

Friends of Maldives

New Appointment

Friends of Maldives has appointed a new coordinator to liaise with the Maldivian Democratic Party. Based in Salisbury, Rebecca Cork will be generating meetings with MPs and meeting with individuals interested in the activities of the MDP in the UK, and increasing media coverage. As a permanent base in the UK this will mean a more structured approach to campaigning as well as administrative support for the party.

Friends of Maldives is setting up an office in Salisbury for Friends of Maldives with the aim of creating a magazine to keep members informed as well as attract media attention and funds. This will become the centre of all Friends of Maldives activity and the first point of contact for members and, of course, benefactors.

Miss Cork worked as a teacher on Malhos in Ari atoll for four months in 2003. She taught in a local primary school, as a result of which she gained a rudimentary understanding of Dhivehi language and culture, and can even write her name in Thaana! Miss Cork was present during the elections and also the riots of 19th September 2003, and so was able to experience first hand the workings of the political system and the current manipulation of national media. She unfortunately returned home in November and could not continue her teaching as a result of her web-published article written in October which was brought to the



attention of the Ministry of Education. Since her return Rebecca has been in touch with the MDP and started work with Friend of Maldives on 26th April.

MDP seeks to expand contacts with all sectors of society

MDP contacts are no longer just politically involved individuals but also academics, writers and professionals who are politically engaged. This expansion indicates the next step in the process of promoting the work of the MDP at home and abroad. Similarly, Human Rights issues have caught the attention of those not specifically engaged in the political workings of the Maldivian Government. Opening up debates in both of these areas is the key to progress and the dialogue between MDP and MPs is beginning to catch the attention of national and local media in the UK. This interest and scrutiny can only serve to strengthen the case against Gayoom and prevent him from acting without first considering the way his actions will affect the world's perception of him.

Friends for Naushad



Naushad Waheed is one of the leading artists in the Maldives and he is behind bars for having been in touch with Amnesty International and for his part in trying for the registration of the Maldivian Democratic Party. In December 2001 he was dragged from his house with all his computers. He was kept in solitary confinement for 5 months during which time he was heavily ill-treated and tortured. The regime in the Maldives has victimised Naushad on several previous

occasions. In 1989 he was kept in solitary confinement and heavily interrogated and ill-treated for 25 days. Then again in 1990 he had to spend more than 4 months in Solitary confinement with his hands cuffed.

Naushad's amazing works can be viewed through his web site :<http://www.naushadarts.com>

We call upon the Friends of Maldives to help Naushad by writing to the President of the Maldives to release him.

The President of the Maldives
Presidents Office,
Male'
Maldives.

In jail they try to reassure eachother,
But in reality they have no other.
They want to see their sisters and brothers.
Go home.

They sit alone trying to stop going insane,
They are locked up during both sun and rain,
They lie in the corner in absolute pain,
And think.

'Will this be our last today?
Please, give me a sign, do help me, pray.
Just some hope, just one ray!
Alone.

And the word that do fear
Is the word that they have to hear.
To any eye, it would bring a tear.
DEATH.

Gayoom never did care.
And now everyone is in despair.
Life there, just isn't fair
Is it?

Kezia Hardingham

