



# Point of No Return

~ Ahmed Naseer ~

Those who gathered the courage to come out of their homes and workplaces in support of reformist MPs of the Special Majlis must be commended for their patience and peaceful behaviour. Their spontaneous action also underlines the reality of the situation. Obviously, the future is not fear, but freedom as John Kerry said in his address to the Democratic Convention in Boston, this July. The government's response to the call of the people can only be categorised as blunt and cowardice. Warnings that curtail civil liberties have been broadcast over the national radio, voice of Maldives. The government's controlled print media as well, carried these notices from the Ministry of Defence. While it was President Gayoom, who enthusiastically declared that radical reforms were required in his famous speech of 9<sup>th</sup> June 2004, it is the Home Ministry that has refused to allow reformers to continue the open debates that were begun.

Revelations in the aftermath of the walkout by 24 MPs of the Special Majlis, on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2004, indicates that the President himself may be implicated in hijacking his own reform agenda. Speaker Hameed, it can be argued, may not be alone, when he tried to impose his will on members' rights and privileges. Despite the double-dealings and terror tactics resorted to by the Government of Maldives in its feeble attempt to suppress the genuine desires and hopes of Maldivians to

become a free people, this may be the beginning of the end for the Regime. While there is no clear time table for actual realistic reform, the President's address to the nation on July 26<sup>th</sup>, totally ignored the realities on the ground. The President refused to even acknowledge that the nation was in the midst of an unprecedented political crisis, and he embarked on a prepared speech that was totally out of touch with reality.

His arrogance is reflected when he uttered that the democratic reforms underway were actually plans and targets identified in the Government's vision 2020 programme. He again urged the newly elected Special Majlis members to hurry their work and to get on with their reform mandate. Behind these pronouncements and false promises his Government continues to ignore the voice of the people. Reports of police harassment and prison torture continue to leak out. Censorship of critical voices on the Internet also remains unchanged. The latest promise made by the President is ostensibly to create a fund to facilitate further education and job opportunities to the youth. Political observers point out that this announcement is actually targeted to those who the government perceives as supporters of businessman and philanthropist Gasim Ibrahim. Mr. Gasim Ibrahim is a popular political figure and is also a member of the Special Majlis. In fact, it is believed that

the government wishes to prevent Mr. Ibrahim gaining a stronger foothold in the reformist platform.

If President Gayoom expected the Maldivian public to have believed a word of what he uttered, he may have to face grave disappointment. As over two decades of unfulfilled promises remain "to his credit", President Gayoom must do more than just give speeches.

Neither Maldivians nor the members of the international community are prepared to continue with this government's deception anymore. This is indicated in the unprecedented gathering of Maldivians on the street on July 19<sup>th</sup>. It is also reflected in the public pronouncements of those within the international community, concerned about the deteriorating political conditions in the Maldives. Consider the immediate questions that arose in the British Parliament, when Rt. Hon. Roger Gale and Rt. Hon. Robert Key tabled questions for the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

For reformers of all colours, their expressions show that they have, in their fight for freedom reached a point of no return. For far too long, people have not dared express their thoughts and opinions. With their new-found courage, the impossible is within their reach and the unheard voice can finally be heard, loud and clear. □

**The Future doesn't belong to Fear, it belongs to Freedom!** - John Kerry, US Presidential Candidate - Democratic Party Convention 29th July 2004

## Happy Birthday Dictator

Mr. Ismail Asif has proved that even dictators can mend their ways - all that is required is a cake with the letters **DICTATOR**. Asif said he felt cleansed, liberated and quite capable of kicking his dictatorial habits. Asif, however, did not specify if his family supported his liberation movement. He certainly had the love and adoration of many freedom loving reformists who yearn for a dictator-free Maldives.

Asif needs to patent his liberation formula for export. He should find a good market across the world from North Korea to Zimbabwe. From Cuba to the Ba'athists

of Arabia, Dictator Cakes would be all the rage. But first he needs to test them more thoroughly and scientifically. The Cake may have cleansed the dictator in him. However, more tests are required before any export orders can be executed. May I suggest that an excellent guinea pig would be our very own Beloved Dictator Gayoom. Our indigenous Dictator, though small in size, is a heavyweight in dictatorship. If Gayoom can be cured so can even die hard dictators like mentor, Saddam.

What a pity Asif did not invent his Dictator Cakes when true blue dictators like Hitler, Pol Pot, Idi Amin, and Mr. Atilla the Hun were around. So much human misery all for the want of a Cake! Mary Antoinette,

instead of suggesting cakes for her subjects should have fed her husband some of Asif's Dictator Cakes. An entire revolution could have been avoided!

It is comforting to know that Gayoom's quarter century of dictatorial (uh... pardon my slip) rule has not destroyed the innovative, entrepreneurial spirit of all Maldivians. Now all scientist Asif needs to have is to invent a Cake that will keep him and his birthday guests out of the clutches of a very sore Dictator and his tautly primed goon squad. Either that or force Gayoom to eat cake, pronto! **Happy Birthday Asif!** May you have many more returns of the day and may the rest of your life be dictator-free. May it be so with the rest of us as well. □

## Opinion

## The New Heresy

Islam is perhaps the most important weapon in Gayoom's arsenal of repression. His background as an Islamic scholar from Al Azhar University initially conferred on him a high degree of legitimacy from the devout 100% Muslim nation. Instead of using this exceptional opportunity to build a just society, Gayoom perverted both Islam and the sentiments of the people to create arguably the most despotic and totalitarian country on the face of the earth – all in the name of Allah.

Promoting Gayoom as God's Chosen One are his mates from Azhar and the more opportunistic scholars from Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Gayoom, however, is his own best salesman. He awards himself the constitutional power to be "the highest authority to propagate the tenets of Islam in the Maldives" as well as "the highest authority of administering justice in the Maldives" – according to his personal version of Islamic Shariah, of course. To further his image as the Chosen One, he has his own magazine (The Path of Religion) that carefully nurtures his self interest in the guise of religious discourse. The weekly Friday sermons broadcast over the electronic media and preached from pulpits across the country are either authored by Gayoom himself or close trustees who plug the Gayoomy version of Islam. The sermons are focused more on making true believers and devotees out of the citizens and less on propagating the tenets of Islam. The Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs is, of course, under Gayoom and is manned mostly by opportunistic ex-Wahhabis turned Gayoomis. The council is devoted to propagating the Word according to Gayoom. The Voice of Maldives ends its daily broadcast with a prayer from Gayoom seeking God's forgiveness for his multi-faceted sins. Deep within, Gayoom seems to realize that he has much to pray for .

Sheik Usman Abdullah, the hitherto low profile Assistant Director General of the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs, is the latest to push the Gayoomy credo. In a recent religious propaganda meeting, the good Sheik took abuse of Islam to new, hitherto unattained heights. The one time agent in Saudi payroll for the

propagation of Wahhabism in Maldives proclaimed a fatwa to the effect that going against Islamic leaders (Gayoom, his family and cronies in this instance) is equivalent to going against Allah and His apostle, Mohamed. The Sheik went on to warn on that the people should strive to give the leaders their rights even as their own rights are being abused by these very same "leaders". According to the learned sheik, prayer is the only option for people deprived of their rights. They must not rise against their "leaders" even if their rights are abused. The people must "bow their heads" in obedience however despotic or corrupt their "leaders" may be. The royal family of Saudi must be delighted by their investment in Sheik Usman Abdullah!

The new message from the Supreme Council is very clear: *Oh ye wretches of Maldives render unto Gayoom what is His and what is yours, deprive Him not of His right to abuse you and swindle you for thine is the kingdom after He (with a little help from his friend, Adam Zahir) sends you to heaven after torturing you to death.*

What I like most about the new messenger, Usman, is his refreshing honesty. He seems to quite clearly recognize that Gayoom is an abusive ruler widely despised by his people. However, I have some difficulties in accepting his argument that God wants us as good Muslims to let our leaders have a free reign over our lives and property and to meekly turn the other cheek as our rights are being violated. What, I wonder, would our plight be if the great religious leaders and revolutionaries of the world subscribed to this Usman/Gayoom's self seeking logic? Imagine, for example, what the world would be if Moses, Jesus and Mohamed just stuck to passive prayers and did not "go against the leaders" as fatwas by the Sheik? The Torah, Injeel and Quran, it seems to me, are great religious books that chronicle the struggle of oppressed people against pharaohic oppressors. It seems to me one of the greatest forms of jihad is to stand resolutely against corrupt and brutal tyrants like the modern day pharaoh of Maldives – Maumoon Abdul Gayoom.

## Early Day Motion Tabled in Parliament

Mark Oaten MP for Winchester has drawn up an EDM, Early Day Motion, which was tabled in Parliament before the deadline last night. The Shadow Home Secretary's researchers have been investigating the situation in Maldives and supportive of the work of MDP and FOM.

Early Day Motion , or EDM, is the term used to describe notices of motions given by Members that are not generally expected to be debated. Effectively, the tabling of an EDM is a device to draw attention to an issue, and to elicit support for it by the means of inviting other Members to add their signatures to the motion.<sup>1</sup>

**That this House, seeing the developing situation in the Maldives, urges President Gayoom and all sides to work for urgent, peaceful democratization; abhors the detention and torture of political prisoners such as documented by Amnesty International; urges the full recognition of the Maldivian Democratic Party; and urges the British government to strengthen its representations on the matter and British and other companies present in the Maldives to refrain from any activity that impedes the growth of democracy.**

The motion will be available to all MP's to sign over the Parliamentary recess. Popular EDM's with lots of signatures

are guaranteed press coverage and can be debated. Friends of Maldives has already met with a significant number of MP's who have expressed concern for the democratic reform processes in Maldives and who will sign the motion.

The EDM covers both Human Rights issues and political reform, but also reflects the letter written by Reporters Without Borders urging Telecoms company Cable and Wireless to ' use its influence in the Maldives to help free jailed net users'<sup>2</sup>. The British Firm however maintained that foreign investors should not intervene in the running of a country. According to the BBC report, 'Reporters Without Borders says that the Maldives is one of the world's most repressive in terms of freedom of expression on the internet'. The EDM however would have Cable and Wireless re-evaluate their stand point in Maldives.

Friends of Maldives now requests that MP's will continue to lend their support to both the EDM and the democratic process in Maldives.

<sup>1</sup> Paragraph from <http://edm.ais.co.uk/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/3911373.stm>



# Violation of the Three Basic Freedoms

## Introduction

Violation of civil liberties and fundamental rights has been a consistent feature of Gayoom's twenty six years of repressive rule. However, on 9<sup>th</sup> June this year, he wowed the international community (and some Maldivians) by promising reforms that would ostensibly usher in a brave new world of liberty, freedom and democracy. However, as many political observers predicted, Gayoom has not taken a single practical step to translate his empty rhetoric to reality. On the contrary, Gayoom's weak political will has meant that violation of civil liberties, if anything, has only increased during the past few weeks. We give below recent instances of violation of the three basic freedoms of association, assembly and expressions of MDP members.

## Freedom of Association

Gayoom continues to deny MDP the right of freedom of association with untenable arguments that seeks to blame everyone except himself for his continuing violation. Gayoom recently proved just how low he can go by publicizing privileged communication sent to him, by his then Attorney General. The correspondence was publicized to deflect blame from Gayoom and to "prove" that the decision not to register MDP is based on legal advice given by the AG. Gayoom is oblivious to the fact that the AG's argument in fact proves quite the contrary - that there is absolutely no legal grounds on which MDP registration can be withheld. The argument only reinforces Gayoom's own assertion that "our laws do not bar anybody from forming a political party if they want to".

The AG's legal assessment only suggests that the laws are inadequate for political parties to function to the same extent as they do in more mature democracies. The article of association and memorandum submitted by the MDP in February 2001 clearly indicates that the party was aware of its legal limitation and was committed to work within legally defined parameters. The MDP was willing, if necessary, to work only as a political advocacy group. In the 3½ years

following MDP's initial attempt at registration, the law has further restricted the space for democratic political participation. All the MDP asked for, and continues to ask of Gayoom is to respect the constitutional rights of the party. Let the MDP function within the laws of the country. Working as a political entity in exile is not what MDP ideally wants to do.

Gayoom has yet to indicate under what law or under what article of the constitution he continues to deny MDP of its right to freedom of association. Gayoom is only further straining his credibility with his stubborn, infantile arguments about the constitution not being "specific" about political parties. As an intelligent person, if not as the chief architect of the present constitution, Gayoom is well aware that the more mature democracies of the world - including those he wants to emulate - do not "specifically" spell out the formation of political parties in their constitution. He is aware that the constitution of such established democracies as our neighboring India, our old "Protector" Great Britain and even the United States are even less "specific" about political parties than our own constitution. Gayoom needs fresh legal advice before his intransigence makes him, and the entire nation, an international laughing stock. Gayoom's childish antics are unbecoming of a Head of State.

## Freedom of Assembly

MDP's first attempt at peaceful assembly ended in a violent crackdown when sympathizers and their families (including children) were beaten, arbitrarily detained and thrown into prison. More recent attempts to discuss Gayoom's reform agenda, too, met with government action to curb the exercise of freedom of assembly and expression. Various obstacles were placed in getting venues for meetings. NSS intimidated, both overtly and covertly, participants at these meetings. For example, a person holding a placard calling for Gayoom's resignation is still being harassed and faces possible jail sentence. Similarly participants attempting to distribute pro-democracy T-shirts were harassed and intimidated right at the meeting.

Organizers of the meeting were intimidated by the Ministry of Home Affairs and two MDP council members were barred (in violation of the law) from holding further meetings. More ominously, Police Commissioner Adam Zahir warned at least one of the organizers against participating in any pro-democracy meetings. It takes great perseverance and an act of courage (or foolishness) to exercise an act as basic as the constitutional right of assembly. Gayoom's supporters (widely believed to be Adam Zahir's private militia within the NSS) continue to send death threats to participants of pro-democracy meetings. Gayoom's Executive Secretary Abdulla Shahid continues to litter the streets of Male' with similar hate-filled threats.

## Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression is perhaps the most tightly controlled and most actively denied civil liberty under Gayoom's repressive rule. Every attempt at exercising this right, every attempt at having an independent media has been brutally and violently thwarted by Gayoom. From Dhuvas at the beginning of Gayoom's rule to Sangu, Hukuru, Manthiri and Dhanfulhi to internet magazines such as Sandhaanu and Fassangu, the story is one of suppression, intimidation, harassment and in most instances, one of unspeakable cruelty, torture and long jail sentences of journalists who dare exercise their right to freedom of expression.

Despite Gayoom's invitation and "encouragement" for robust debate, the past few weeks has witnessed open harassment and intimidation of those who expressed their hopes and aspirations for democracy. Fearful of the outpouring of pro-democracy sentiments, Gayoom has now decided to act in open defiance of the constitution by banning freedom of expression with the spurious argument that no more discussion is necessary because the Special Majlis will be convened soon. It is difficult to imagine how freedom of assembly and expression could be more blatantly violated. Gayoom openly violates his citizen's fundamental rights without

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so much as even the rudiments of an excuse.

In the meantime, various obstacles and government red-tape continue to be placed before anyone attempting to register a newspaper or a magazine. MDP council member Nazim, for example, was recently denied the right to publish a magazine. Even internet news magazines (including this newsletter) continue to be banned, keeping Maldives – according to Reporters Sans Frontiere – firmly entrenched as one of five biggest violators of internet freedom of expression. However, internet hate sites (operated by Gayoom’s Executive Secretary Abdulla Shahid, Police Commissioner Adam Zahir’s hirelings and members of Gayoom’s family) continue to flourish under the patronage of His Excellency the President.

Gayoom’s denial of civil liberties extends even to elected members of the parliament. He is quite democratic about that. When parliamentarians fall out of line his brother Hameed, first tries to browbeat them into submission. When that fails, hired thugs are employed to intimidate them into following the Gayoomy line. When even if that fails, the reformist MP’s are thrown into jail and exiled on bogus, trumped up charges, thereby depriving them of their right to advocate on behalf of their constituency. Former members of Gaaf Dhaal and Male’ (MDP activists Latheef and Nasheed) are victims of such harassments. Reformist MPs like Gasim Ibrahim, Dr. Waheed, and Mohamed Didi (Mody) were forced resign out of fear for their lives and liberty.

In the very first meeting of the Special Majlis, temporary Speaker Hameed attempted to conduct Majlis deliberations in violation of article 133 of the constitution which stipulates that the Speaker of the Special Majlis shall be elected through a secret ballot – and not through a show of hands as demanded by Hameed. Even when 19 of the 20 members who spoke demanded that the constitution be followed, Hameed with his familiar arrogance, rudely interrupted them, insisting that he will follow tradition and do it his way. Hameed, like brother Gayoom, treats the Maldives as their family fiefdom. Subjects, the family is aware, need not be accorded the luxury of civil liberties – certainly not such dangerous rights as freedom of expression. Gayoom, his family and cronies are aware that Maldives has a document called “constitution”. However the family is not willing to let their subjects exercise constitutionally guaranteed civil liberties such as the three basic freedoms of association, assembly and expression. After over a quarter century of unchallenged Family dominion, the Kaaminee Clan is not about to let an abstract concept of inalienable fundamental rights undermine what they see as their birthright. Make no mistake about this: we Maldivians will never be able to exercise our fundamental human rights as long as Gayoom remains our despotic ruler. My message is simple :

**Need your freedom? Get rid of  
Gayoom the Tyrant!**

## Letters

### The Nexus of Evil

I wonder why MDP is so protective of Yaamin. Surely you must know he is arguably the most corrupt swindler in the country? The most pompous, conceited jackass as well? His deals with unsavory, crooked resort owners are legendary. Why even the trickle down effect of bribes is enough to make minions like “underwear” Nazim a rich millionaire. Are you aware that Yaamin has a seemingly unlimited budget – partly STO furnished – to bribe his party through to the parliament?

Yaamin is not willing to take chances that Big Brother Gayoom will indeed make him prime minister, when the new constitution is done – hence Plan B and forging of the nexus of evil. Yaamin and the diabolic, sadist Commissioner Adam Zahir are meeting on a regular basis hatching plans to remain in power, should Dictator Gayoom falter. If the duo had their way we would have already had a military coup, leaving Yaamin to his robbing while the good Commissioner would be free to indulge in his favorite sport of torturing and maiming unarmed detainees and prisoners. All would be well.

Word has it that the Evil Ones are expanding their horizons to enlist militant groups from neighboring countries to contain the opposition – especially the ladies and gentlemen of the MDP. If you are not aware of these developments, please change your name to **Maldivian Dumbo Party**. □

### Reject “Government” Zahir

Ahmed Zahir (AKA Seena Zahir, Puss Zahir, “Citizen” Zahir and now “Government” Zahir) has proved to be one of the great opportunists of our time.

At the time Gayoom came to power Zahir was hailed as a true hero willing to stand up against the tyranny of former dictator Ibrahim Nasir. He was, according to an old friend, “the Conscience of the Nation”. Not much of Zahir’s conscience remains intact.

A veteran member of parliament, Zahir was rejected by his constituency – a rarity for a serving member of the cabinet. He was rejected because he was seen by the voters to be arrogant, unrepresentative of his constituency and corrupt. He was also seen to have sold his soul to Gayoom and brother Yameen in exchange for guaranteed job tenure as a member of the cabinet.

The people reject Zahir but Gayoom immediately rejects the will of the people and nominates him as his member to the parliament. Gayoom is now quite confident that he has Zahir well and truly in his pockets – a little puppet who will readily dance to his tunes. That, of course, is precisely why Gayoom is campaigning so hard and so personally to have Zahir as his puppet Speaker of the Special Majlis. Gayoom needs a constitution tailor-made to suit him. Zahir is one of the most competent tailors around. Perhaps he should be renamed “Gayoom” Zahir – or “Tailor” Zahir? □

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secretariat@maldiviandemocraticparty.org . ދަތުރުގެ ސެކްރެޓަރިއެޓްގެ ފޯމުގެ ތެރެއިން ފޯމު ފުރިހަމަކުރުމަށް .





