

American Foreign Policy Council

MALDIVES

QUICK FACTS

Population: Number 392,960 (July 2016 est.)

Area: 298 sq km

Ethnic Groups: South Indians, Sinhalese, Arabs

Religions: Sunni Muslim (official)

Government Type: Presidential Republic

GDP (official exchange rate): \$3.27 billion (2015 est.)

Map and Quick Facts courtesy of the CIA World Factbook (January 2017)

OVERVIEW

The Maldives, an Indian Ocean archipelago nation, has faced a number of internal challenges in recent years, from economic and environmental concerns to radical Islam and political infighting. However, what has attracted global attention is the country's status as a safe haven for the growth of a radical strain of Islam. This Sunni-majority Islamic nation has been confronting a grassroots Islamist surge that has been overlooked for over a decade, and the country has proven fertile ground for transnational jihadist recruitment. The nation has been struggling to cope with Salafi jihadist ideology, which has gained ground among large swaths of the population and among the nation's youth in particular, with reports emerging of young Maldivians participating in the ongoing Syrian civil war.

ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

The Islamic Foundation of the Maldives (IFM)

The Islamic Foundation of the Maldives (IFM) is non-profit religious organization. IFM was founded in April 2009 by Ibrahim Fauzee, an Islamist previously arrested in Karachi, Pakistan, and detained at Guantanamo Bay for his links to al-Qaeda. According to its previous website (now defunct), the IFM aims to “promote and protect Islamic tenets and ethics, create religious awareness, and to uphold social events within the boundary of Islamic principles and [the] Religious Unity Act in the Maldives.” The IFM’s Islamic activism was highlighted when Mohamed Nazim, a Maldivian, was assaulted after he raised some doubts about Islam and his own religious beliefs during a meeting addressed by Islamic preacher Zakir Naik. In 2010 The IFM immediately urged the government and court to strip Nazim of his citizenship and sentence him to death (based on Islamic *sharia* and the Constitution of Maldives), if he did not repent.¹ Nazim relented, reportedly under duress, and publicly apologized for questioning Islam.

Jamiyyatul Salaf

One of the most prominent Islamist groups is the Jamiyyatul Salaf (JS), a non-governmental religious group that propagates an ultra-conservative strain of Islam. JS has *Wahhabi/Salafi* lineage and a strong anti-secular ideology. It supports Islamizing education and promotes intolerance toward other religions, especially Christianity. Many of its members are known to have been educated in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. As part of its campaign to raise Islamic awareness and promote the values of Islam, the group regularly invites Islamic preachers and scholars to the Maldives in conjunction with the country’s Ministry of Islamic Affairs. The JS is also actively engaged in moral policing: in 2008, it declared music to be *haram* (forbidden) and forced a school library in Male to close because it contained Christian books. In 2012, vehement pressure from radical and other conservative religious groups like JS prompted the Islamic Affairs ministry to issue guidelines on permissible public behaviour, including any prohibiting mixed-gender dance events.

In November 2011, Jamiyyatul Salaf activists demonstrated against the UN Human Rights chief Navi Pillay’s comments on flogging and the country’s “discriminatory” constitutional provisions. The JS has received some political support in its anti-UN campaign, especially from political parties, including the Dhivehi Rayyithunge Party (DRP) and the PPM. JS has recommended the use of Saudi-style beheadings and firing squads over lethal injections for a convicted murderer in accordance with the Islamic principle of *Qisas* (equal retaliation).²

JS remains at the forefront of pro-Islamic activities in Maldives and issues religious edicts and guidelines intermittently to enforce various Islamic grievances. For example, in June 2016, JS’s member Sheikh Sameer issued an edict through social

media discouraging Maldivians from participating in the International Yoga Day, which according to him “is not permissible for Muslims because it is part of Hinduism.”³

Adhaalath Party

One of the most significant Islamist political party in the Maldives is the *Adhaalath* (Justice) Party (AP). More radical political parties like AP control the nation’s Ministry of Islamic Affairs, and they have long advocated for the strict implementation of *sharia* in all parts of the Maldives. The party holds conservative views on gender issues—opposing, for instance, the eligibility of women in presidential elections. Under its influence, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs has regularly invited foreign scholars and preachers with extreme religious views to the Maldives to address large and small groups on religious matters. Foreign Islamic scholars and preachers like Zakir Naik (India),⁴ Bilal Phillips (Jamaica), and Sheikh Abdur Raheem Green (UK) with extreme religious views and misogynist outlooks are among those to have been invited to the Maldives by the Ministry.⁵ Zakir Naik, a “televangelist” who runs the satellite television channel “Peace TV,” is known for his preaching sessions and his inflammatory comment that “every Muslim should be a terrorist.”⁶

AP has also banned visits to Sufi tombs and shrines because its leadership deemed praying there to be un-Islamic. The party supports reinstating a ban on public visits to the Medhu Ziyaarai, the tomb of Abu Barakat Berberi, who is credited with introducing Islam to the Maldives.⁷ The country’s Islamic Ministry, however, has ordered the shrine to remain open on the condition that no flags would be hoisted in or around it.

AP has also urged the government to ban music and songs that have been harming Maldivian youths. According to the pro-Islamist political party, “Cigarettes, music and Internet are gateways to higher addictions like alcohol, pornography and hard drugs. Attack root cause and save our kids.”⁸ However, despite pressure from pro-Islamist groups, Male administration refrained from imposing any legal proscription on music or dance.⁹

Members of JS and AP vehemently criticized former President Mohamed Waheed Hassan Manik when he asked for a review of the conviction of a minor who was sentenced to flogging by a juvenile court on Feydhoo Island.¹⁰ According to AP, flogging is the penalty for fornication under *sharia* and maintains that the “purpose of penalties like these (flogging) in Islamic Sharia is to maintain order in society and to save it from sinful acts [...] and no one has the right to criticise any penalties specified in Islam.”¹¹

Malé Attack

The first and to date only Islamist terrorist attack in the country took place in the national capital, Malé, in September 2007, when a crude bomb blast injured nearly 12 foreigners, including tourists from the UK, Japan, and China. The attack targeted

the tourism industry for its alleged un-Islamic practices and sinful influence on local culture. Subsequently, a massive crackdown prompted extremists to flee the country, mostly to neighbouring Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Three terrorists—Mohamed Sobah, Moosa Inaz and Ahmed Naseer—confessed to the crime and were sentenced to 15 years in jail in connection with the attack.¹² The search and sweep operation that ensued after the bombing uncovered an illegal *Dar-ul-Khair* mosque located on an isolated island in October 2007, where many extremists were hiding. The situation erupted into a violent confrontation between radical members of the mosque and security forces. The standoff at *Dar-ul-Khair* was featured in an al-Qaeda propaganda video in November 2007, which raised concerns within the country's security circles that the transnational terrorist group was gaining a foothold in the country. The propaganda video, titled: "Your brothers in the Maldives are calling you," was made by a hitherto unknown group known as *Ansar Al Mujahideen* and posted on the al-Qaeda-linked *Al-Ekblaas* web forum, in order to attract recruits and raise capital for militant activities in the Maldives.¹³ Maldivian authorities eventually unearthed similar Islamist outposts, such as an island located in North Ari atoll that provided safe heaven to extremists.

A subsequent al-Qaeda video circulated in November 2009 and featured Ali Jaleel, a Maldivian national who fought alongside pro-Taliban forces in Pakistan. Soon thereafter, another recruitment video featured a previously unknown al-Qaeda cell operating covertly in unregulated *madrasas* in the Maldives, and exhorted *jihadi-ists* to travel to the country.¹⁴

The Pakistan Connection

There have been many instances of Maldives citizens traveling to Pakistan to engage in terrorist activities. In 2009, nine Maldivians were arrested in Pakistan's Waziristan tribal region during security raids at the militant training camps there.¹⁵ Later that year, Maldivian al-Qaeda member Abu Jaleel and two of his associates carried out a suicide attack on Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence Agency headquarters in Lahore.¹⁶ In the early weeks of February 2010, nine alleged Maldivian terrorists who had been arrested in Pakistan's troubled South Waziristan tribal region in March 2009 were repatriated to the Maldives.¹⁷ According to national police, the nine suspects had ties to the bombing that took place in Malé's Sultan Park in September 2007, and they may have left the country for Pakistan via Sri Lanka for further training and indoctrination.¹⁸ They were repatriated by the government to the Maldives in two phases, for de-radicalization. The suspects included Yusuf Izaadhy (who, according to a leaked U.S. cable, was planning to establish a terror group in the Maldives with the assistance of a Pakistan-based group) and two other individuals identified as Easa Ali, and Hasnain Abdullah Hameedh.¹⁹

In 2016, Mohamed Abdul Rahman was charged with terrorism and participating in a foreign war. Abdul Rahman travelled to Pakistan in 2007 under the pretext of continuing his studies, and engaged in militant activity there for almost ten years.²⁰

In February 2010, the government estimated that there were 200-300 unregistered Maldivian students in Pakistan.²¹ The offer of free education in Pakistani madrassas is widely acknowledged as a core means of radicalizing Maldivians locally, with well-meaning parents sending their children off on scholarships to “study Islam.”²² Though there is no recent statistics regarding the number of Maldivian students are presently undergoing various educational courses, bilateral ties in the sphere of education was boosted with an Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) during the Maldivian President Abdullah Yamin Abdul Gayoom’s visit to Pakistan in May 2015.²³ In the past, the Maldivian government, including former President Mohamed Nasheed, has admitted that Pakistan-based terrorist groups have successfully recruited hundreds of Maldivian Muslims to fight against government forces in Pakistan.²⁴

The Islamic State

The transnational jihadi movement has affected the Maldives in the same way that it has affected many other parts of the world. Maldivian youths are reportedly joining the al-Qaeda-affiliated *Jabhat Fateh al-Sham*, formerly known as the *Al-Nusra Front*, which is active in Iraq and Syria, as well as the Islamic State. While government sources insist that fewer than 50 youths have joined *jihadi* groups, various reports suggest that nearly 250 Maldivians have travelled to Syria and Iraq so far to participate in the ongoing civil strife in the Middle East alongside foreign militants affiliated with al-Qaeda or the Islamic State.²⁵ In March 2016, three Maldivians were arrested in Turkey while attempting to illegally cross over into Syria. These individuals, identified as Munnawar Abdulla, Ahmed Latheef and Ahmed Suhail, were extradited to the Maldives the same month.²⁶

One explanation for Maldivian youths’ interest in becoming foreign fighters is targeted media. The Bilad Al Sham Media (BASM) is an online media forum, presumably run by Maldivians in Syria, that propagates and publicizes Maldivian jihadists and their heroics in the battlefields.²⁷ It has detailed the experiences of Maldivian *jihadis*, mostly young university students, as they travelled to Syria through a transit country with the hope of establishing an Islamic state that would ultimately “liberate the Islamic world” and achieve the global of an “Islamic caliphate.”²⁸

The Islamic State of Maldives

Reports of the establishment of the Islamic State of Maldives (ISM), purportedly a local branch affiliated with the Islamic State, emerged in July 2014, coinciding with the country’s Independence Day celebrations. An Islamic State flag was hoisted for the first time in the capital Male’s Raalhugandu area. ISIS flags were also seen during the early August 2014 protest march against Israel’s military operations in the Gaza Strip, with protestors burning both American and Israeli flags. There were banners and flags clearly displaying the Maldivian flag crossed out with a message in the local Divehi language stating: ‘This flag is directly under the slavery of America. If there

was any independence, it would have been possible to implement Allah's Shari'a. Don't mock yourself, talking about independence."²⁹ The other banner with ISIS's flag depicted the message: "If you want real independence, try and get under the shelter of this flag. That will be the day when we break free from the shackles of the Kuffar and celebrate. Insha Allah."³⁰

ISM has been active in popular social networking sites for *jihadist* propaganda, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Its primary purpose is to promote the Islamic State in the Maldives, to create awareness about the Islamic State and to convey its messages to the Maldivian people. It urged Maldivian youth to: "strive for the Caliphate and to stand up against the existing democratic system of governance," which, according to the ISM, has "ruined Maldives."³¹

Conflicting allegiances notwithstanding, a whole new generation of young men appears to be gravitating to radical Islamist ideals, using social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, to propagate violence and intolerance, and to display the flags and insignia of jihadist groups. These youth have two things in common: the desire to have strict sharia implemented in the Maldives, and a hatred for democracy (which is viewed as un-Islamic). There have also been repeated incidents of Islamist vigilantes abducting and interrogating young men in Malé and elsewhere and forcing them to identify online activists advocating secularism or professing atheism through social media sites. Soon after the abduction of journalist Ahmed Rilwan in August 2014, the Islamic State of Maldives released a video on YouTube that depicted the execution of U.S. journalist James Wright Foley. It also contained a message threatening to kill Maldivian atheists, stating, "We shall borrow your heads."³²

ISLAMISM AND SOCIETY

The Maldivian population is almost 100% Muslim, with citizenship strictly confined to practitioners of the Islamic faith. Most Maldivian Muslims belong to the *Shafi* school of Sunni Islam. The official language of the Maldives is Dhivehi.

The culture of the Maldives has undergone changes in recent years, and many believe it is progressively being *Wahhabized* and more and more adherents (particularly among the youth) are following a *Salafi-jihadi* ideology. In January 2011, an investigative report citing Maldivian intelligence officials concluded that Maldivian youths are increasingly attracted to the idea of transnational jihad, as discussed above.³³

The influence of external and more extreme Islamic ideologies can be seen in changing dress codes for women, the increasing frequency with which men wear long beards, and in the name changes adopted by foreign-funded mosques around the country. Although the full veil is illegal in the Maldives (and even headscarves are banned for female television anchors), many women on Himandhoo Island have begun to cover themselves completely.³⁴ Ahmed Naseem, who served as foreign minister until the bloodless coup of February 2012 that toppled the democratically elected

government of Mohamed Nasheed (Maldives Democratic Party), has stated that religious orthodoxy has become the norm in the Maldives, with an increasing number of Maldivians receiving sponsored madrassa education in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.³⁵

Maldivian women in particular are targeted in this environment. They face public floggings for adultery and rape. A 2009 investigation found that Muslim courts in the country had sentenced almost 150 women to public flogging for adultery.³⁶ Reports citing data from the Criminal Court show that there were 67 women who were flogged for adultery in 2010. Out of the 129 fornication cases that were filed in 2011, 104 people were sentenced. 93 of those sentenced were women. A young woman from the island of Feydhoo was raped by her stepfather, and then convicted of pre-marital sex in a juvenile court. She was sentenced to 100 lashes and eight months of house arrested in February 2013.³⁷

In 2014, the Islamic jurisprudence body known as the Fiqh Academy publicly rejected a woman's right to consent to sex in a spousal relationship. The vice president of the academy, Dr. Mohamed Iyaz Abdul Latheef, said, "With the exception of forbidden forms of sexual intercourse, such as during menstrual periods and anal intercourse, it is not permissible under any circumstance for a woman to refrain from it when the husband is in need... [and should show] complete obedience to her husband."³⁸ The Academy has also endorsed other degrading and harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation.³⁹

In 2015, woman, a mother of five, was convicted by a local judge on a remote island for adultery and giving birth out of wedlock, and sentenced to death by stoning. This sentencing, the first of its kind in Maldivian history,⁴⁰ was reportedly issued under section 1205 of the penal code, which states that Islamic *sharia* punishments must be meted out to persons found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt of committing a crime for which punishment is prescribed in the sharia.⁴¹ However, the Maldivian Supreme Court overturned the ruling.

The attempt to implement strict *sharia* in the Maldives has on occasion triggered confrontation and violence. Many liberal intellectuals, writers and activists who have challenged the idea of the strict implementation of Islamic practices have been targeted. Dr. Afrasheem Ali, a renowned liberal religious scholar and lawmaker, was assassinated in early October 2012,⁴² and there were attempted assassinations against two writers and social activists: Aishath Velezinee in January 2011⁴³ and Khilath Rasheed in June 2012.⁴⁴

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs claims to have developed de-radicalization methods and has been taking measures to curb the activities of the various transnational Islamic organizations that have arrived in the Maldives in recent years.⁴⁵ However, radical interpretations of Islam and calls for *jihad* against non-believers are finding an increasing number of supporters in the Maldives. Islamist hardliners have called for

adopting “Arabesque” alternatives in all aspects of life, including determining the age at which women reach puberty and proscribing how convicts should be executed in an “Islamic way.”⁴⁶

Other instances of rising extremism in the Maldives include the “Defend Islam” campaign of December 23, 2011.⁴⁷ Demonstrators with placards and banners stating “We stand united for Islam and the nation,” “No idols in this holy land,” “No to the Zionist Murderers,” and “We stand for peace” descended on the streets of Malé, accusing then-president Mohammed Nasheed’s administration of defiling Islam, promoting Western ideals and culture, and restricting the spread of more austere Islamic practices. The campaign and demonstrations in support of Islam were spearheaded by Islamic non-governmental organizations and some mainstream pro-Islamic political parties, including the Adhaalath Party and the party of former President of Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, the Progressive Party of the Maldives (PPM).`

Hundreds of Maldivians took to the streets in September 2012, protesting against a film made by an independent filmmaker based in the U.S. entitled *Innocence of Muslims*, which was widely perceived as offensive to the Prophet Muhammad and sparked protests worldwide. The rally, which was called “In Protection of the Prophet Muhammad,” resulted in the burning of an American flag and the display of placards with anti-American and anti-Jewish slogans such as “May Allah Curse America” and “Maldives: Future Graveyard of Americans and Jews.”⁴⁸

ISLAMISM AND THE STATE

With the adoption of the country’s 1997 constitution, Islam became the state religion, and the chain of nearly 1,200 coral islands that make up the Maldives was declared officially Islamic.⁴⁹ Non-Muslims are forbidden from proselytizing and conducting public worship in the Maldives. Any Muslim who converts to another faith is breaking *sharia* law and can lose his or her citizenship. Migrant workers of other religions are denied the ability to practice their faith. The government also prevents the import of non-Muslim books and other religious items. However, people from other religions are given permanent residence permits to work, mostly in the country’s hospitality industry, which serves as the economic lifeline of the Maldives. Despite its economic benefits, many radical Islamic groups active in the Maldives have denounced what they view as tourism’s negative influence on local Islamic culture.

In July 2000, then-President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, reportedly under pressure from radicals, declared in a public address that there is no room in the Maldives for any religion but Islam. He reiterated his stance on numerous occasions, and went on to accuse foreigners of destroying religious unity by introducing other faiths.⁵⁰ Gayoom claimed that the Maldives achieved and sustained its sovereignty by ad-

hering only to Islamic principles. During the reign of Gayoom, who was himself an alumnus of Cairo's famed Al Azhar University, where he studied Islamic jurisprudence, the country experienced a new Islamic revival. In the 1980s and early 1990s, intense Islamic indoctrination was undertaken under the government's direct patronage, and mosques (*miski*) were built en masse. During that time, Quranic schools also emerged as major educational institutions. Gayoom has been accused of having brought Islamic fundamentalism into the country, and of using "Islam as a tool of governance."⁵¹ Under the Gayoom regime, Islamic preachers and madrassas received unconditional political and financial support.⁵²

After almost three decades of authoritarian rule, the Maldives became a multi-party democracy in 2008 with the election of the liberal Mohamed Nasheed as President. Although Nasheed's party, the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), has progressive views on religion, its main ally, the *Adhaalath* Party, holds conservative views on religious and cultural matters. According to one official, there were at least seven Islamist radicals running in the 2008 elections, though all of them lost.⁵³ However, Nasheed did not remain popular for long. Due to his economic strategy and alleged anti-Islamic policies, discontent reached a crescendo when Nasheed's government arrested Judge Abdulla Mohamed on January 16, 2012. A politico-religious coalition (the December 23 Alliance for Defending Islam) then accused Nasheed of violating the Maldivian constitution.

In February 2012, Nasheed was ousted in what was believed to be a bloodless coup⁵⁴ and replaced by then-Vice President Mohammed Waheed Hassan Manik. Though the alleged coup was never proven,⁵⁵ Nasheed claimed that he was forced out of office by security personnel at the behest of opposition political parties. The President of the Adhaalath Party, Sheikh Imran Abdulla, and PPM Vice President Umar Naseer were reportedly responsible for orchestrating the ouster of Nasheed.⁵⁶

Nasheed's MDP government had resisted calls from extremists to shut down the country's luxury tourist resorts that serve alcohol, pork, and facilitate "pleasure tourism." Since Nasheed's ouster from power, the Islamic Ministry, which is responsible for religious affairs in the Maldives, has proposed the adoption of "Islamic tourism" without these basic elements, arguing that it works in Saudi Arabia where alcohol is not available, even at posh hotels frequented by Westerners. Political parties like the Gayoom-led PPM call for an alternative economy based on oil, rather than depending on the "anti-Islamic" tourism industry that facilitates public dancing, singing and massage parlors. Gayoom and others who propagate this Islamic tourism may find more takers among the conservative populace, but this development will certainly impact the future of the Maldives' famed tourism industry.

In the post-Nasheed era, there was a renewed call for the implementation of sharia in all walks of life in the Maldives. His immediate successor, President Mohammed Waheed Hassan, was seen as more favorable to radical Islamist ideas, or at least passive in

the face of their overtures, ignoring extremists and allowing them to freely advocate their beliefs.⁵⁷ The Islamic Ministry has admonished young jihadis in only the mildest terms, stating that “No Muslim scholar in the Maldives has called on Maldivians to participate in foreign wars, but there are youth, who get emotional from what they see, of the suffering of Muslims, there are Maldivian youths who want to avenge that.” The October 2015 Anti-Terrorism Act criminalized the act of leaving the Maldives to fight in a foreign war or joining a banned terror group. The offence is punishable by a jail term of between 10 to 20 years.

Under Waheed Hasan’s administration, Islamic Affairs minister Sheikh Mohamed Shaheem Ali Saeed, who is a member of the *Adhaalath* Party, waged a virulent campaign against Christians and what he termed “Freemasons” for conspiring to erase Islam from the Maldives.⁵⁸ This tactic was not unexpected, as a common political smear in the Maldives is more liberal politicians being accused of promoting Christianity or conducting business with Jews. Shaheem Ali, who remains among the chief advocates of puritanical Islamic beliefs in the Maldives, reportedly published a book where he proposed the idea that the Maldives should become an emirate of a Middle Eastern country, such as Saudi Arabia. According to sources, Sheikh Shaheem indeed appears to be working towards this goal, as he has made significant effort as a Minister to steer Maldivian foreign policy towards Arabic countries while distancing it from the West.⁵⁹

Under the new Progressive Party of Maldives government led by President Abdulla Yameen since mid November 2013, there are now efforts being undertaken to replace the ultra conservative Fiqh Academy, in spite of vehement criticism from various Islamic organizations as well as opposition political parties. In April 2016, the country’s parliament amended the 1994 Religious Unity Act to set up a new Supreme Council for Islamic affairs, or *Fatwa Majlis*, with the authority to issue *fatwas* or legal opinions on religious disputes.⁶⁰ It is to be noted, however, that the same Fiqh Academy of Maldives that is currently under fire issued a *fatwa* in August 2015 prohibiting participation in foreign civil wars.⁶¹

In the Maldives, there is an ever-growing risk of religious extremism now as underground Islamic vigilante and criminal groups have been increasing, and intimidating progressive voices to remain silent. Now that a string of youths have already joined global *jihadi* organizations and are spreading their wings travelling to remote war zones and undergoing trainings and indoctrination, their return to Maldives will be far more dangerous to the Maldivian society and for the region at large, as their heroics back home would draw more takers and followers for future *jihad*, making Maldives a potential safe haven for transnational *jihadi* foot soldiers.

ENDNOTES

[1] IFM's previous webportal had published this release titled, "Islamic Foundation's views about the apostate," May 29, 2010, <https://web.archive.org/web/20131006040534/http://islamicfoundationofthemaldives.org/sites/default/files/Press%20release%202.pdf>; Also "See, Islamic Foundation calls for death sentence if apostate fails to repent", Minivan News Archive, June 1, 2010 <http://minivannewsarchive.com/politics/islamic-foundation-calls-for-death-sentence-if-apostate-fails-to-repent-7606>

[2] "Religious NGO Jamiyyathul Salaf recommends beheading, firing squad over lethal injection," Minivan News Archive, February 26, 2013, <http://minivannewsarchive.com/society/religious-ngo-jamiyyathul-salaf-recommends-beheading-firing-squad-over-lethal-injection-53689>

[3] "Despite cloud of Islamist criticism, Yoga Day events in the Maldives go off without a twist", Scroll India News, June 22, 2016, <https://scroll.in/article/810439/despite-cloud-of-islamist-criticism-yoga-day-events-in-the-maldives-go-off-without-a-twist>.

[4] Zakir Naik's visit (May 25-31, 2010) was organized by the Islamic Foundation (IFM) and Islamic Affairs ministry. See the transcript of Zakir Naik's response to Mohamed Nazim at the Male's Maafaanu stadium, 28 May 2010, Minivan News Archive, http://minivannewsarchive.com/files/2010/05/Dr_Zakir_Naik_and_Nazim-1.pdf

[5] Bilal Philips created a major controversy when he preached that it was Islamic to marry off young girls as soon as they reached puberty, irrespective of their age, an idea that was endorsed by the Salaaf (JS). Phillips visited the Maldives along with Abdur Raheem Green on the invitation of JS in the first week of June 2010. The JS's misogynistic ideals and preaching have drawn criticism in the past and triggered the creation of a feminist movement in Maldives, known as Rehendhi. JJ Robinson, "Feminist group launches letter writing campaign against sponsors of Dr Bilal Philips event", Minivan News Archive, May 27, 2010.

[6] Naik was banned from entering the UK for his speeches in June 2010 and most recently, in November 2016, his organization Islamic Research Foundation (IRF) was banned by Indian government. See, "Modi govt bans Zakir Naik's NGO Islamic Research Foundation for 5 years", Firstpost, November 15, 2016, <http://www.firstpost.com/india/modi-govt-bans-zakir-naiks-ngo-islamic-research-foundation-for-5-years-3107076.html>. For his most outrageous comment, see, for example, "Every Muslim Should be a Terrorist," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bxk5AAA5FbI>

[7] "Sacred Shrine Opened to Public," Dhivehi Observer, March 29, 2009, (Archived in) <http://doreview.blogspot.in/2009/03/sacred-shrine-opened-to-public.html>

- [8] “Maldives cracks down on men and women dancing together”, Agence France Presse /NDTV.com, September 14, 2012, <http://www.ndtv.com/world-news/maldives-cracks-down-on-men-and-women-dancing-together-499304>
- [9] “Maldives: President rejects ministry’s ban on mixed-gender dance events”, Arts Freedom, September 18, 2012, <https://artsfreedom.org/maldives-president-rejects-ministrys-ban-on-mixed-gender-dance/>
- [10] “Maldives girl, 15, sentenced to 100 lashes for ‘fornication’”, The Guardian, March 01, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/mar/01/maldives-girl-100-lashes-fornication>
- [11] “15 year-old rape victim deserves flogging for separate crime of fornication: Adhaalath Party”, Minivan News Archive, February 28, 2013, <http://minivannewsarchive.com/politics/15-year-old-rape-victim-deserves-flogging-for-crime-of-fornication-adhaalath-party-53861>
- [12] “Three people involved in Sultan Park bombing sentenced to 15 years”, December 2007, <http://www.policelife.mv/page/19695>
- [13] “Ansar Al Mujahideen Targets the Maldives”, Threat Watch, November 2007, <http://threatswatch.org/rapidrecon/2007/11/ansar-almujahideen-targets-the/>
- [14] “First Video of al-Qaeda in Maldives Released,” Adnkronos International, November 20, 2009, <http://www.adnkronos.com/AKI/English/Security/?id=1.0.1575824650>.
- [15] “Nine Maldives jihadists held in Pakistan”, The Hindu, April 04, 2009, <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/Nine-Maldives-jihadists-held-in-Pakistan/article16608723.ece>.
- [16] “The Maldives and US link in ISI office attack, The News (Karachi), March 08, 2013.
- [17] “9 Armed Maldivians Arrested in Waziristan,” Miadhu News, April 2, 2009; “Maldivian Detainees Repatriated from Pakistan,” Minivan News Archive, February 8, 2010. <http://minivannewsarchive.com/politics/maldivian-detainees-repatriated-from-pakistan-3296>
- [18] “Aim was to Perform Jihad by Targeting Non Muslims – Police,” Miadhu News, November 8, 2007.
- [19] Al-Qaeda associates active in Maldives: State Department cable, Haveeru Daily, December 6, 2010.
- [20] Hassan Mohamed, “Trial begins for Maldivian man ‘who fought in Pakistan for nine years’”, Maldives Independent, January 15, 2017, <http://maldivesindependent.com/politics/maldivian-man-who-fought-in-pakistan-for-nine-years-brought-to-trial-128388>.
- [21] United States Department of State, Office of the Coordinator of Counterterrorism, Country Reports on Terrorism 2010 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, August 2011), <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4e5248203c.html>.

- [22] Author's (Animesh Roul) Interview with J J Robinson, Former editor, Minivan News. (March 2013).
- [23] "Pakistan, Maldives sign four MoUs", Dawn, May 07, 2015, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1180523>
- [24] "Radicals in Pak Recruiting our Youth: Maldives," CNN-IBN (New Delhi), October 25, 2009. <http://www.news18.com/videos/india/maldives-pres-intw-327314.html>
- [25] "Maldives again downplays jihadist threat, places number at 49", Mihaaru, June 16, 2016, <http://en.mihaaru.com/maldives-again-downplays-jihadist-threat-places-number-at-49/>
- [26] "Three Maldivians en route to Syria extradited", Maldives Independent, March 24, 2016, <http://maldivesindependent.com/society/three-maldivians-en-route-to-syria-extradited-122998>
- [27] "Bilad al Sham Media" <http://biladalsham.wordpress.com/>; Also See, Bilad al Sham Media's Facebook page (presently defunct), <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Bilad-Al-Sham-Media/253167868224266>
- [28] Ahmed Rilwan, "Maldivian militant killed in Syrian suicide attack, claims online jihadist group", Minivan News Archive, May 25, 2014, <http://minivannewsarchive.com/politics/maldivian-militant-killed-in-syria-suicide-attack-claims-online-jihadist-group-85600>
- [29] Author's translations of the Graffitis under the Flags.
- [30] Author's translations of the Graffitis under the Flags.
- [31] ISM social media site has since been blocked, Screen shot available , with Author
- [32] ISM social media site has since been blocked. Screen shot available , with Author
- [33] Anupam Dasgupta, "A Male-Volent Link," The Week, January 16, 2011.
- [34] "Maldives Moves against Veiled Women, Jihadis," Daily Times (Lahore), November 15, 2007.
- [35] Tom Wright, "Islamism Set Stage for Maldives Coup," Wall Street Journal, February 11, 2012, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970203824904577215050907606404>.
- [36] Andrew Buncombe, "150 Women Face Adultery Flogging on Maldives," Independent (London), July 22, 2009, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/150-women-face-adultery-flogging-on-maldives-1757150.html>
- [37] Neil Merritt, "Fifteen year-old's appeal of flogging sentence for fornication stalled in High Court," Minivan News Archive, August 3, 2013, <http://minivannewsarchive.com/politics/fifteen-year-olds-appeal-of-flogging-sentence-for-fornication-stalled-in-high-court-61850>

[38] Even though the president of the Maldives called it “un-Islamic,” the Fiqh Academy’s fatwa on the subject may have adherents within the Maldivian society. See, Fiqh Academy Vice President Dr. Mohamed Iyaz Abdul Latheef’s views, as cited in “President Yameen vetoes sexual offences bill,” Minivan News Archives, January 15, 2014, <http://minivannewsarchive.com/politics/president-yameen-vetoes-sexual-offences-bill-75176>.

[39] Zaheena Rasheed, “Fiqh Academy VP endorses female genital mutilation,” Minivan News Archives, February 6, 2014, <http://minivannewsarchive.com/politics/fiqh-academy-vp-endorses-female-genital-mutilation-77037>

[40] “Maldives court sentences woman to death by stoning,” Maldives Independent, October 18, 2015. <http://maldivesindependent.com/crime-2/maldives-court-sentences-woman-to-death-by-stoning-118541>.

[41] Shahindha Ismail and Mushfique Mohamed, “Why the sentence on death by stoning is unconstitutional,” Maldives Independent, October 20, 2015, <http://maldivesindependent.com/feature-comment/sentence-on-death-by-stoning-is-unconstitutional-118640>.

[42] “MP Afrasheem stabbed to death,” Haveeru Online, October 2, 2012.

[43] “ICJ says Velezinee attack politically motivated,” Haveeru Daily, January 6, 2011.

[44] “Slashed journalist claims attack was targeted assassination by Islamic radicals,” Minivan News, July 2, 2012.

[45] “Islamic Ministry Proposes Extremist Rehabilitation Centre,” Minivan News Archive, March 18, 2010, <http://minivannewsarchive.com/society/islamic-ministry-proposes-extremist-rehabilitation-centre-4640>

[46] Author’s (Animesh Roul) Interview with J J Robinson, Former editor, Minivan News. (March 2013).

[47] See “Protests proceed peacefully as a majority defends Islam,” Minivan News Archive, December 23, 2011, <http://minivannewsarchive.com/politics/protests-proceed-peacefully-as-a-majority-defends-islam-29826>

[48] “Protests over anti-Islamic movie spread to the Maldives,” Minivan News Archives, September 15, 2012, <http://minivannewsarchive.com/society/protests-over-anti-islamic-movie-spread-to-the-maldives-43852>.

[49] Article 10 of the Maldivian Constitution states the religion of the Maldives is Islam and Islam shall be the basis for all laws in the land. The constitution granted right to freedom of expression in Article 27; however, it stipulates that the right only exists as long as it is “not contrary to any tenet of Islam.”

[50] Gayoom said while addressing a 4,000 strong crowd that “We want to bring reform to the Maldives, reform that leaves no room for other religions.” See “Asia’s Longest-Serving Leader in Maldives Run-Off,” Associated Press, October 27, 2008.

[51] Maldivian Democratic Party leader Mohamed Latheef once said that Gayoom is the person who brought Islamic fundamentalism to the Maldives. See “Radical Islam Shows up in Maldives,” CNN-IBN (New Delhi), June 21, 2007, <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/maldives-turns-to-islamic-extremism/27821-2.html>.

[52] “Maumoon Abdul Gayoom - the Father of Maldivian Extremism,” Dhivehi Observer, October 10, 2007; Aishath Valenzinee, “Gayoom’s abuse of faith,” Himal South Asian, October 2007, http://www.dhivehiobserver.com/editorial/Islamic_Extremism_Maldives__101007.html; See also <http://himalmag.com/component/content/article/1325-.html>

[53] Anupam Dasgupta, “A Male-Volent Link,” The Week, January 16, 2011, (Archived in) <http://www.maldivestoday.com/2011/01/18/a-male-volent-link/>.

[54] The anti-Nasheed wave existed before due to his economic policy and alleged anti-Islamic policies, it came into open with the arrest of Judge Abdulla Mohamed on January 16, 2012 when a politico-religious coalition (December 23 Alliance for Defending Islam) accused him of violating the Maldivian constitution. The pro-Islamic alliance led by the President of Party Sheikh Imran Abdulla and Vice President of Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) Umar Naseer reportedly orchestrated the ouster of Nasheed.

[55] An independent Commission of National Inquiry (CoNI) ruled out any coup and the findings largely supported by the U.S. and the Commonwealth of Nations. See “Nasheed ouster not a coup: probe panel,” August 30, 2012, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/nasheed-ouster-not-a-coup-probe-panel/article3839500.ece>.

[56] Azra Naseem, “Operation Haram to Halal – the Islamist role in replacing Nasheed with Waheed”, Minivan News, February 18, 2012, <http://minivannews.com/politics/comment-operation-haram-to-halal-the-islamist-role-in-replacing-nasheed-with-waheed-32294>. Also see Tom Wright, “Islamism Set Stage for Maldives Coup,” Wall Street Journal, February 11, 2012, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203824904577215050907606404.html>.

[57] “No other presidency granted more freedom to religious scholars than the current regime- Shaheem,” Miadhu Daily, February 1, 2013.

[58] “Islamic Ministry claims Christians, Freemasons secretly working to ‘eradicate’ Islam in the Maldives,” Minivan News Archive, February 12, 2013, <http://minivannewsarchive.com/politics/islamic-ministry-claims-christians-freemasons-secretly-working-to-eradicate-islam-in-the-maldives-52751>.

[59] Author’s Interview with Azra Naseem.

[60] “President authorized to constitute religious advisory body”, Maldives Independent, November 22, 2016, <http://maldivesindependent.com/politics/president-authorised-to-constitute-religious-advisory-body-127839>

[61] The fatwa reads, “Travelling to Islamic countries where groups belonging to Islamic countries create havoc and instability in the name of jihad will open avenues for enemies of Muslims to interfere in the affairs of Muslim countries.” , See, “Fiqh Academy issues fatwa on Jihad”, Maldives Independent, August 25, 2016, <http://maldivesindependent.com/society/fiqh-academy-issues-fatwa-on-jihad-116727>