



# Problems with presidential elections of the Maldives

Ilyas Ibrahim, President Gayyoom's brother-in-law and then Minister of Atolls Administration, made an unsuccessful attempt to come to power in 1993.

Ilyas was sent diplomatically to Singapore and then he was tried in court in absentia on various charges including the use of black magic to come to power. Several people who had close links with Ilyas, even some NSS officers, were stripped of their positions. Nevertheless, Ilyas received 18 votes when the parliament elected a candidate for the presidential election of 1993. He is said to have bribed some of the MPs. Gayyoom won more votes by a narrow margin but the votes Ilyas received was a shock, especially as by then Ilyas' power had been reduced after his plot had been uncovered.

At the time the parliament used to elect a single candidate to run in the presidential election. The MPs elected the candidate in a secret election and thereafter the candidate will be put in a yes or no public referendum. There was no way of knowing who will be elected by the parliament until the results of all votes by MPs are counted. Hence, the 18 votes Ilyas received was a real shock. President Gayyoom and his associates realized how vulnerable this system was and how it could be exploited against them.

Maldives had its first constitution on 22 December 1932. Since then the country was ruled as a constitutional monarchy. A republic was established on 1 January 1953 but it was short-lived and monarchy was restored on 21 August 1953. The constitution was revised on 7 March 1954. A second republic was proclaimed on 11 November 1968. Maumoon Abdul Gayyoom became the second president of the second republic on 11 November 1978. In his first year in office, the parliament passed a bill to amend the constitution. President Gayyoom formed a People's Special Majlis on 29 November 1980 and assigned it the task of amending the constitution. It took more than 15 years for the People's Special Majlis to complete the task. When the new constitution was completed on 6 November 1997 it received the assent of the president on 27 November 1997 and came into force on 1 January 1998.

In addition to the excessive powers granted to the President under the new constitution, it also introduced multi-candidate presidential elections. According to the new constitution people could contest to be candidates in the election held in the parliament. This way the regime will know in advance if anybody has the intention of becoming the president. The candidate who receives most votes from the ballot in the parliament will run as the presidential candidate. As in previous years, the public will have only one candidate to vote in the referendum.

The first presidential election after the new constitution came into force was held in 1998. According to the constitution any Maldivian could nominate himself as a presidential candidate if he meets the following criteria

- a Muslim of Sunni following
- a citizen of the Maldives whose parents and grandparents are Maldivian citizens
- a male who has attained 35 years of age
- a person of sound mind and capable of carry-

ing out the duties and responsibilities of a President

- must not have been convicted of an offence for which a Hadd has to be applied according to Islam or of criminal breach of trust and brought into disrepute
- should not be married to a national of a foreign country.

Ten days were given in 1998 presidential elections for candidates to submit the nomination papers. Five candidates filed the nomination papers. Commissioner of Elections sent their names to the Speaker of the parliament. A special meeting of the Parliament was held on 24 September 1998 to nominate a candidate to be submitted to the general public referendum. Maumoon Abdul Gayyoom received the vote of all MPs who were present at the meeting. The referendum was held on 16 October 1998.

This election was the first presidential election in which foreign observers were brought to observe the election process. The group of observers coming from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka were named as The Observer Group of Eminent Persons (OGEP). They observed the election process in some islands and Male'. Their report concluded that the election was free and fair and involved no fraud. In the election Gayyoom received more than 90 percent of the vote.

***The eight MPs appointed by President enjoy equal rights in the parliament as the MPs who are elected by the people. They could vote in the secret ballot held in the parliament to pick a presidential candidate. The 8 MPs could also vote for or against bills in the parliament. This is a clear example of how the Executive is abusing the Legislature.***

The president of the Maldives enjoys extensive powers. He appoints the Speaker of the Parliament, the Chief Judge, the justice minister and judges of courts. The Judiciary is completely under the control of the Executive, the courts coming under the justice ministry. When the people of the country have only one candidate to vote for as the President, it is important to see whether the legislature that is electing that candidate for the referendum, is truly representative of the people.

The parliament in the Maldives comprises of 50 members. There are two members representing each atoll of the Maldives, (there are 20 atolls) and two representing the capital island Male'. In addition, there are 8 members appointed by the President.

The members of the parliament include cabinet ministers and senior officials of the government. They win the seats using excessive powers and election fraud. It is evident that there is a conflict of interest between their roles as MPs and government officials. There is no opposition in

the parliament. There are no political parties.

In countries such as UK, the government is formed from the parliament, by the party that wins the general elections. The leader of the party becomes the Head of the Government or the Prime Minister. Hence, the Head of the Government is representative of the people. The parliament consists of an opposition and there are checks and balances.

In the Maldives the parliament is nothing more than a rubber stamp of the Executive or the leading regime. In creating constituencies, the population has been ignored in the electoral system and only the geographical aspects have been considered. For an example, the people of Vaavu Atoll also elect two MPs, while there are two seats for Addu Atoll as well. Vaavu Atoll has a very small population of around 1,000, while even the island of Hithadhoo in Addu Atoll has more people than Vaavu Atoll. At the time of 1999 General Elections there were 13,827 people who were eligible to vote in Addu Atoll while there were only 967 eligible voters in Vaavu Atoll.

Interestingly, before the presidential elections of 1998, Ari Atoll was split into two atolls. The two parts were named as North Ari Atoll and South Ari Atoll. Elections were held to elect MPs for only one part of the Ari Atoll while the MPs who were elected in the parliamentary elections of 1994 by the people of the Ari Atoll remained as representatives of the other part. If a constituency is divided to form two new constituencies, it is rational to hold elections in both constituencies. However, the regime wanted to keep the previous MPs. The real reason for splitting Ari Atoll and bringing two new MPs to the parliament was to increase President Gayyoom's chances of being elected as the presidential candidate in the election of 1998. After what happened in 1993 the links between the Executive and the Legislature had to be strengthened further.

In fact Gayyoom's narrow win in 1993 was aided by another questionable factor; the 8 MPs appointed by the President. These eight members enjoy equal rights in the parliament as the MPs who are elected by the people. They could vote in the secret ballot held in the parliament to pick a presidential candidate. As Gayyoom appoints only very trusted people as the 8 MPs, it is clear that they will vote for him. The 8 MPs could also vote for or against bills in the parliament. This is a clear example of how the Executive is abusing the Legislature.

It is pathetic that the 8 MPs appointed by the President have equal powers as the MPs who are supposedly elected by the people. The 8 MPs play a crucial role to elect the ruling President as the next presidential candidate. The elections in the parliament are overseen by the Speaker, who is also appointed by the President. Presently the Speaker is Gayyoom's brother Abdulla Hameed.

After the puppet show in the parliament is over the people gets to say yes or no to the presidential candidate. The supporters of the regime could say there is no flaw in the system because the candidate will be elected as President only if the candidate gets majority votes as affir-





# Are fair elections held in the Maldives?

There is growing evidence that Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe rigged the last presidential election to win it. Suspicions centre on a 'command centre' run in Harare by two of Mugabe's closest associates. It is said that just hours before the election result was announced there was a major fraud. Mugabe would have lost by 200,000 to 300,000 votes if not for this fraud. The opposition candidate Morgan Tsavangirai were did better than expected despite all the bullying by the Mugabe regime.

R.W. Johnson, a former Oxford professor who was covering the election for a British newspaper pointed a finger at the registrar-general. A reform group in Zimbabwe was allowed to examine the official voting register early 2002 and found that it listed about 5.2 million voters. Johnson said the ruling party illegally added 400,000 extra voters before the election to the register increasing their chances of winning. Johnson says around 1.8 million people in the official voting list do not actually exist. He also said a study by the reform group shows that only 50 percent of the people in the final roll live in the addresses given. Only they could legitimately vote in their constituencies. Johnson concludes that false votes for Mugabe were between 900,000 and 1.1 million.

This story of election rigging has many parallels with the election process in the Maldives. In a country ruled by a president who has ruled for almost the same lengthy period as Mr Mugabe, the elections are far from being fair.

In the Maldives also the elections are closely monitored in a 'command center' where the votes are counted. Ordinary civil servants are included in the counting process but the final decisions are made by people who are very close to the ruling regime. Sometimes the results are announced after a long delay, in which the results are tampered with. In 1999 parliamentary election, a delay in announcing the results of the election for Malé's two seats caused the supporters of Mohamed Nasheed (Anni), a popular candidate who ran for a seat, to gather around Dharubaaruge, the command center. The ballot boxes would take sometime to reach from other atolls to Male'. However, the boxes for Male' could be immediately taken to the counting centre and hence it was rational that the vote of Malé be counted sooner.

The Elections Commission had said that the counting of votes would begin at Hakuraa Maalan of Dharubaaruge after voting ends at 8.00 pm on 19 November 1999. However, the Commissioner of Elections announced the results for Male' via TV Maldives at 11.35 pm on 20 November 1999.

Parliamentary elections were held in the Maldives in 1932, 1937, 1941, 1946, 1951, 1956, 1961, 1966, 1969, 1974, 1979, 1984, 1989, 1994 and 1999. In addition, by-elections have been held on several occasions to elect MPs when seats become vacant due to various reasons.

President Gayoom and his cronies came to power in November 1978. The first parliamentary election held after their ascent to power was in 1979.

## The election of 1979

The election of 1979 was announced on 7 September 1979, the names of candidates were announced on 15 October 1979 and the election was held on 16 November 1979.

In Haveeru, a local daily newspaper, it was mentioned on 27 November 1979 that the Elections Division had decided to postpone announcing the results of the election for some atolls because the Elections Division had received reports that in those atolls incidents contrary to the regulation concerning General Elections had occurred. Haveeru reported a press release issued by the Elections Division said an announcement would be made concerning the issue, which the Division was investigating, when everything became clear.

Election was held again in Addu Atoll and in Kulhudhuffushi island of Haa Dhaalu Atoll in 1979. This indicates the election of 1979 was not so smooth.

This was the time of rooting out all opposition and consolidating power. According to the first issue of Sandhaanu, an underground e-mail newsletter, a number of MPs critical to the regime were blacklisted and imprisoned during the first parliament of the current regime. Sandhaanu says Ali Katheeb from Haa Dhaalu Atoll Vaikaradhoo, Sheikh Hussain Yoosuf and Azeez from Meedhoo suffered under the regime with Azeez becoming disabled because of torture. Sandhaanu said after that it became difficult to win a seat in parliament without government approval while island chiefs and mudhims - people who lead prayers - who did not support the government started losing their jobs.

The 'Ali Katheeb' that Sandhaanu mentions seems to be Ali Sulaiman from Gulfaamuge house in Vaikaradhoo island in Haa Dhaalu Atoll. In the election of 1979 he came first for Haa Dhaalu Atoll with 1,327 votes and won a seat.

Sheikh Hussain Yoosuf, who holds a government post even now, comes from Hithaadhoo island in Baa Atoll. He won a seat for Baa Atoll in the election of 1979 with 799 votes and again in the election of 1984 with 791 votes.

'Azeez from Meedhoo' that Sandhaanu mentions could be Abdul Azeez Mohamed whose address at the time of 1979 election was Gongali house in Machangolhi ward of Male'. He won a seat for Dhaalu Atoll in the election of 1979 with 698 votes. As there is a Meedhoo island in Dhaalu Atoll, this Azeez could have been from that island. Meedhoo Azeez passed away on 20 March 2003.

## The election of 1984

The election was announced on 1 October 1984, the candidates' names were announced on 5 November 1984 and the election was held and announcing of the results began on 7 December 1984. The Commissioner of Elec-

tions was Mr Abdul Sathar Ahmed Didi.

In 1984 election was held again in Raa Atoll Ali-fushi, proving that there was fraud.

## The election of 1989 and aftermath

The election was announced on 9 September 1989, candidates' names were announced on 18 October 1989, the election was held and announcing of the results started on 24 November 1989. The Commissioner of Elections was Mr Abdul Sathar Ahmed Didi.

The election of 1989 was exciting in many ways. Dr Mohamed Waheed Hassan Maniku, a PhD, had returned to Maldives after his studies and was running in the election for a seat of Male', the capital island. He introduced the sign of thumbs-up fist as his campaign logo which was painted on many walls of Male'. This was the first time such logos were used in parliamentary elections in the Maldives. This was a factor that increased the public interest in the election. A large majority of the public were backing Dr Waheed.

Yoosuf Rafeeu, who is known by the nickname of Yoosay, a TV comedian, was also contesting. He was famous for his TV series Dhiriulhumakee Mieebaa (Is this what living is?) which criticized social problems, made fun of famous local characters including government officials. Each of Yoosay's comedies had to go through strict censorship before the state-owned television station telecasted it. Yoosay was also very popular in Male'.

Dr Waheed's campaign reached unprecedented levels in Male'. The thumbs-up logo was painted on walls on request and also on billboards. Supporters printed and distributed leaflets to all households in Male'. According to a publication by the Libertarian Party of Maldives (LPMV) titled 'Gayoom's Democracy', over 4,000 letters were sent addressed to the person in Dr Waheed's own name. Campaign t-shirts and badges were distributed, especially to the youth by the campaign participants, who were also mainly youth.

According to LPMV the campaign of Dr Waheed was so strong, one of his contenders, Mr Ilyas Ibrahim started working against the campaign by painting over the thumbs-up logo. Police started confiscating the badges and banning wearing of t-shirts with the logo. As Ilyas was the Minister of Trade and Deputy Minister of Defense and National Security and the second-most-powerful-man in the country, he had resources at hand to do that. Ilyas is a brother-in-law of President Gayoom.

Some of the activities were carried out by 'Bimbi Force' a group of middle-aged men backed by Ilyas and his brother Abbas Ibrahim, who was also a cabinet minister.

"The Force against reforms consisted of middle aged people who were mainly ex convicts freed after having served their sentence/s. Most of these people were looking for a way to pre-

serve their self respect and earn easy money being under the protection of two Ministers. The group became known in Male' as "Binbi Force" which got the name from one of the members nickname," LPMV's 2001 publication Gayoom's Democracy said.

"It was evident that a force in the Government as incidents proved it backed the Binbi Force. For example cases against members of the Binbi Force were ignored by the Police even with eye-witnesses. The painting of Dr.Waheed's symbol in Majeedhee Magu, Sosun Magu, were often in the presence of the Police personnel which was ignored. It is specially noted that a boy who had been delivering a Death Warning when caught and handed over to the police, with a note to the President was just ignored," Gayoom's Democracy said.

Dr Waheed received an overwhelming victory in the elections. Even though Ilyas Ibrahim was elected to the other seat of Male' the election results was a victory for the people who favored reform and backed Dr Waheed. Some people believe it was actually Yoosay who came second in the election but the results were altered to give a seat for Ilyas.

It is evident that the election of 1989 was not conducted fairly. The March 1990 issue of Sangu, a popular magazine of 1990 that was later shut down, highlighted this. According to Sangu, the authorities had previously announced how the votes would be counted. The announcement was broadcasted on multiple occasions by Voice of Maldives on 23 March 1989 and 24 March, the day of the election. The said announcement made it clear that the whole ballot paper would be counted void if one of the votes cast is unclear (to read) or for any reason that it has to be made void. All individuals could vote for any two candidates and it was clear that one part of the ballot paper will not be counted (one vote for a candidate will not be counted) if the other vote that the individual had cast for the next candidate was void.

The election results for Male' as announced by the Elections Division's 22/89 announcement is as follows:

The number of people who voted in Male' : 7,131

The number of votes all candidates received: 13,439

Void votes: 543

Total number of votes: 13,982

If the number of people who voted in Male' was 7,137 then the total number of votes should be 14,262 (7,137 multiplied by 2). The number of votes all candidates received should be this figure minus the void votes (14,262 minus 543) which is 13,719. However, the figure that the Elections Division had stated as the number of votes all candidates received is 13,439. There is a difference of 280 votes (13,719 minus 13,439) which went unaccounted.

Sangu also pointed out that the number of void votes and the number of votes that the candidates received should be even numbers if the counting procedures as announced by the Elections Division were followed. However, this was not the case and Sangu said this indicated there was fraud in the counting process. Sangu also stressed that the Commissioner of Elections replied to the people who inquired about the said matters that there was no further explanation he could give them, indicating there was

a major fraud.

A candidate for Male', Mr Zakariyya Jameel of Naares house in Machangolhi ward, sent a letter to the Elections Division requesting for an explanation in the discrepancies in the election results. He sent a copy of the letter to Aafathis and Haveeru, the two dailies being published in Maldives at the time. The Elections Division issued a press release shortly after that.

The press release of 30 November 1989 admitted that there were unaccounted 280 votes missing in the election results of Male'. It said if the 7,137 people voted for two candidates the total number of votes should be 14,262 and that the announced number was 13,982 thus creating 280 missing votes.

The press release explained that this happened because during the counting process if one candidate's name written by an individual was unreadable and if the other name was clear, then the clear name was counted as one vote. The unclear name was dismissed and not counted as void votes. The Elections Division said this was the procedure followed in the previous elections as well and this was done to protect the rights of the candidates and give them maximum chances. The press release said the total number of void votes for Male' was 823 which was derived after adding the said 280 votes to the 543 votes that was announced as void votes by the 24 November 1989 announcement of the Elections Division. The press release said, since the missing votes were void votes, that would not alter the number of votes any candidate received, and hence the overall election results. The press release further said during the counting process this happened in Ari Atoll and Male' Atoll as well and that the number of void votes of those atolls were also changed later.

Sangu said the press release was broadcasted by Voice of Maldives after 5.00 pm news on 30 November 1989. At 4.00 pm Zakariyya Jameel was taken to Ministry of Home Affairs and Sports to investigate about the letter he sent to the Elections Division, which was functioning under the Ministry of Home Affairs. At 9.00 pm he was released but on 2 December 1989 at 12.00 pm he was taken again to Ministry of Defense to investigate the same matter. He was charged with trying to create hatred among the people towards the government by sending copies of the letter, which should be a state secret, to daily newspapers and publishing the letter in those papers.

Election rigging and manipulation occurred in Fuamulah too in the election of 1989. This led to an escalation of violence in the island in early 1990. In the 27 April 1990 issue of Aafathis the daily reported that following a question it had put forward to the Ministry of Atolls Administration about the reasons for the violence and conflict that had occurred in Fuamulah in the first few months of 1990, the ministry said the violence started after the parliamentary election of 1989. The violence in Fuamulah led to the government to send a 5 member delegation comprising of officials from Ministry of Defense and National Security, Ministry of Atolls Administration and Ministry of Education to investigate the matter.

In 1990 Mohamed Nasheed (Anni), who was a famous journalist back then, was arrested because of an article he wrote for a foreign

newspaper saying that the parliamentary election of 1989 involved fraud. Anni presented solid evidence as a proof of what he said but the regime silenced the matter through his arrest.

In 1989 voting was held for a second time in Maakadoodhoo, perhaps after a fraud was discovered. Re-election could be held for two reasons: after a discovery of a fraud that is too big to be ignored; and when an unfavorable candidate wins, hoping that the re-election could bring a better one.

Despite the fraud in the election of 1989, in other atolls also a number of young members were elected to the parliament. They started open debate about various issues. It was a remarkable time in the history of Maldivian politics. Two newspapers, Sangu and Hukuru, were publishing articles criticizing the regime. A corruption case with a magnitude Maldives never experienced before came to light. Some of the MPs started calling for amendments to certain laws and to investigate the corruption cases thoroughly. The regime had to resort to dirty tricks to control the MPs who advocated reform. A number of MPs resigned from their posts because of the regime's bullying and pressure. New elections and by-elections were held in those constituencies.

Mohamed Latheef, a MP for Gaafu Dhaalu Atoll, was sentenced to six months banishment on 15 April 1991 for allegedly speaking in a manner that threatened public safety and banished to Mulhadhoo island in Haa Alifu Atoll. Latheef resigned from his post as a MP following the charges.

A by-election was held on 25 May 1990 to elect a member for a vacant seat for Shaviyani Atoll. Ahmed Abdulla of Fenfiyaazuge house in Maroshi island of Shaviyani Atoll won the by-election.

On 16 June 1991 the Elections Division announced that the election held in Dhaalu Atoll on 24 November 1989 was cancelled according to the 10th article of the Election Law. The announcement 21/91 said the date for holding the election again would be proclaimed later.

The election was held on 12 July 1991. Haveeru said on 15 July 1991 that the ballot boxes arrived Male' on 14 July 1991 in a special dhoni. Haveeru said six members contested in the election including a former MP and a senior official of the ministry that regulates the elections (presumably Ministry of Home Affairs). According to Haveeru the two members elected for Dhaalu Atoll in the election of 1989 were separated from their posts because one of the members was convicted of a bribe charge. This is very interesting as the whole election was cancelled due to a charge made against one member. In 2002 a by-election would be held in Male', when one of the two MPs was convicted, while the other MP remained in the seat.

The votes cast on 12 July 1991 in Kuda Huvadhoo island of Dhaalu Atoll were cancelled and voting was conducted again on 19 July 1991 in the island because a woman who was not eligible to vote had voted on the first occasion. Haveeru said on 20 July 1991 that Hafsa Adam of Dhethandimaage house in Kuda Huvadhoo, who was not eligible to vote but had voted, was brought to Male'. Haveeru said the Assistant Atoll Chief of Dhaalu Atoll, Dhon Maniku and Junior Island Chief of Kuda Huvadhoo, Ahmed

Jamal, who were supervising the elections on 12 July 1991, were also brought to Male'. Elections Commissioner said the three people would be sent to trial after investigation.

The affair in Dhaalu Atoll demonstrates that fraud in voting occurs in the elections in the Maldives. The officials in the islands are involved in the fraud and only rarely do such a case is investigated.

A by-election was held on 10 July 1992 in Male' because Dr Waheed resigned from the post. The people of Male' tried to elect 'Ugulhey', a petty businessman who used to vendor clothes and stuff from house to house, for the vacant seat as a gesture of protest over the regime's pressure on liberals. According to the fourth issue of Sandhaanu, when Ugulhey ran as a candidate, he was charged with bribing a Judge, and was convicted to 6 months banishment. Hence, the people of Male' could not vote for Ugulhey. Sandhaanu said there was no judge to whom Ugulhey gave a bribe.

Only 3,967 people out of the 14,840 eligible voters in Male' voted in the by-election held on 10 July 1992. That was 26.73% of the eligible voters in Male'. Minister of Home Affairs Umar Zahir told Haveeru that he was not satisfied with the number of people who had voted. He said the problem of low voter turnout had to be solved even if through the passing of a law. Abdulla Kamaludeen won the seat with 2,204 votes.

## The election of 1994 and aftermath

The election was announced on 29 September 1994, the candidates' names were announced on 1 November 1994 and the election was held on 2 December 1994.

For the first time foreign observers were brought to monitor the elections. They came from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, the six countries that together with Maldives form the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

The 17 November 1994 issue of Aafathis reported that Ministry of Atolls Administration said it was unaware that Atoll Chiefs and Island Chiefs were abusing their powers to promote certain candidates. The ministry's Director General Fathimath Sheereen told Aafathis that the ministry had not received any such complaints and was not aware of any such issues. Ironically Sheereen herself was a candidate for Gaafu Alifu Atoll and it was believed that the island chiefs were promoting her because she was a senior official from Atolls Ministry. Atoll Offices and Island Offices come under the administration of the Atolls Ministry. She would win a seat in the election.

Haveeru reported on 3 December 1994 that a number of people went back without voting because of various difficulties. Haveeru said most of them were people working in resort islands who came to Male' to vote. Commissioner of Elections Abdulla Rasheed told Haveeru that the people who came from resorts found it difficult to vote because all resorts sent the people at the same time. "How could we know that all resorts will send the people at the same time?" Rasheed asked.

The people coming from atolls and residing in Male' and the workers from resorts had to vote in Male'. Haveeru said there was one ballot box in Male' for the people of some atolls with a small population while for people coming from atolls with a large population also one box was allocated. For example a number of people from Addu Atoll went back without voting because there was only one box for them in Majeediyya School.

Even after dusk fell, the voting continued because there remained some people who had not voted by then. Some people voted in the dark. Haveeru reported that since there was no lighting in the small tent inside which the voting took place, some people used their bicycle lamps while voting.

On 7 December 1994 Aafathis reported that Commissioner of Elections Abdulla Rasheed said if a complaint was filed within one month then the matter would be investigated. He said as the Law stipulates the election process has to be finished within a certain period things cannot be made pending because a complaint might come. The Law said election process has to be completed 25 days before the term of the current parliament is over.

Haveeru reported on 4 December 1994 that the Commissioner of Elections said announcement of the election results for Male' Atoll was being delayed because a complaint was being investigated and that a 3-member committee had been sent to the island where the complaint originated. Haveeru said it had been informed that the problem occurred in Gaafaru island of Male' Atoll. Haveeru later reported that the Commissioner of Elections said any errors in Gaafaru were not proved.

Aafathis reported on 22 December 1994 that Commissioner of Elections said the Elections Commission was receiving complaints regarding the election. He said the complaints included those about abuse of power and concerning people casting votes in the name of others. The Commissioner said the Elections Commission was investigating the cases. Asked whether the election results would change if any of the cases was proved, Abdulla Rasheed said it was not yet clear if the results would change.

On 24 December 1994 Aafathis quoted Commissioner of Elections as saying that the people who were in charge of the voting in Haa Dhaalu Atoll Kuludhufushi and Hirimaradhoo had admitted to abusing their positions and powers to commit fraud in the election. He said the public were thinking that the government had held voting again in two areas of the said two islands because two candidates that the government did not favour were elected. Rejecting this notion and detailing the fraud, he said the people at the counting table first pointed out handwriting that was similar in many of the vote papers. He said in Hirimaradhoo more than 50 votes were written by one person.

Rasheed said in Kulhudhuffushi five bundles of vote papers were put in a box even without separating the papers and that in all bundles the handwriting was the same. He said voting was held again in the areas where the fraud had occurred.

Haveeru said on 6 December 1994 that (in the election of 1994) 50 vote papers were stuck together in each bundle. Haveeru said a pencil

could be inserted into the space allocated for putting the vote papers.

Rasheed said some people believed that voting cannot be held in a particular area and that it must be held in the whole atoll. The Commissioner told Aafathis that even in the past the election was cancelled and voting was held in the whole atoll only in one occasion and that was in Addu Atoll in 1979. He said the election was held again in Addu Atoll that year because of the nature of incidents that had occurred in the atoll at the time.

He added that voting was held again in Kulhudhuffushi in the election of 1979 while in 1984 election was held again in Alifushi and in 1989 voting was held for a second time in Maakadoodhoo.

Following the discovery of fraud, election was held again in Area 3 allocated for election in Kulhudhuffushi and in Hirimaradhoo on 9 December 1994.

The Elections Commission also said the result for Thaa Atoll was being delayed because suspicions arose during the counting of votes.

Despite all those cases of fraud, the observers who came from SAARC countries declared the election to be fair. According to the 6 December 1994 issue of Aafathis, the observers submitted their report on the election to the government. Aafathis said the observers, who observed the voting process in Male', admired the efficient manner in which the election was held and declared the election to be free and fair. According to Aafathis, the observers also noted that the campaign of candidates went very smoothly. The group of observers, coming from the politically volatile South Asia, noted there were no public protests and demonstrations during the election; something that is very common in some countries during elections. Aafathis reported that the observers' report said the people had the right to vote for the candidates they supported and there was no abuse of power during the election.

It appears that what was published in Aafathis about the report of the observers was what the government had fed to the media. On 5 December 1994, Haveeru said "journalists were not given a copy of the report prepared by the six observers who stayed at Kurumba Village Resort at government expense, nor were the journalists told about the number of pages in the report."

The coordinator of the observers was Mr Farouq Choudhry, the Honorary Counsel of Maldives in Bangladesh. The fact that he was Honorary Counsel of Maldives proves he had good relations with the government. It is doubtful how independent the group of observers were, and according to Aafathis they had observed only the election in Male' and not in the atolls. Hence, their conclusions about the election are more than debatable.

In the election, two candidates the people had favored were elected for Male': Mr Abdulla Kamaludeen and Mr Ahmed Mujuthaba. Kamaludeen's popularity would decline later after he accepted the post of a Minister. Mujuthaba resigned almost a year after his election because he was not having any progress in the regime-dominated parliament. A by-election was held, there was low voter turnout,

and Minister of Construction and Public Works Umar Zahir was elected for the seat vacated by Mujuthaba. Umar Zahir, who was dissatisfied with the low voter turnout in the by-election of 1992, was now elected in a by-election with low voter turnout.

## The election of 1999

The election of 1999 was held on 19 November 1999. The Commissioner of Election was Ibrahim Rashad.

In the 15th General Election, 125 candidates from 20 constituencies contested for 40 seats. In the constituency of Noonu Atoll initially 3 candidates contested but one of them withdrew his name and the remaining two candidates were given the seats without holding election. The two MPs who were given the seats are Ali Mohamed and Abdullah Yameen, the Minister of Trade and Industries and brother of President Gayoom. It was Abdul Ghanee Ali from Daisymaage house in Velidhoo island in Noonu Atoll who withdrew his name.

It is said that Yameen ensured that one candidate withdrew the name so that he could win the seat easily. It is also said some people who intended to run for Noonu Atoll changed their minds because of Yameen's threats. Yameen was the MP for Noonu Atoll even during the previous term, as was Ali Mohamed, and Yameen was so unpopular among the people of Noonu Atoll that there was a slight chance for him to win in a free election.

In contrast to previous elections, the ballot boxes were not put in government offices such as island offices and courts in the election of 1999. The boxes were put in public places such as schools. Another difference was the ballot boxes were not locked when the first voter arrived. The box was shown to the first person who came to vote, then locked and a security tape was put to seal the box. Previously the box was locked and it was shaken to prove to the first group of voters that no votes had been cast in advance. The Commissioner of Elections had said that the new measures were introduced after following the advice of the observers of 1998 election, to lift the doubts the voters may have. The Commissioner also explained that the security tape that seals the box is not available in the Maldives and is rare to find even abroad.

Speaking at a meeting held at Dharubaaruge on 15 November 1999 to mark the Republic Day of the country, President Gayoom said among the forms of government that best protects the interests of the people and that is most beneficial to the people is democracy and a democracy had been established in the Maldives. He said even in neighboring countries violence and conflict can be observed coinciding with elections. Gayoom said, however, that by the grace of God, all elections in Maldives had been held smoothly and peacefully.

"Each election held in Maldives so far has been a free election. And each election symbolized the peace and harmony prevailing in the Maldives," Gayoom said.

Gayoom said foreign observers were brought during the General Election of 1994 and the Presidential Election of 1998. He said the

observers noted in their report that elections in Maldives are held smoothly and that they are free elections. He said they had noted with satisfaction in their reports that not a single act of violence had occurred in each of the elections.

Truth cannot be more different. Even in the presidential election of 1998, there were incidents of conflict between some people and island officials who tried to impose their will on the people and restrict free election. A number of people were detained during the election.

The Elections Commission said a group of observers would observe the election in 6 areas of the country in the election of 1999 and submit a report of their findings. The areas where they were to be present were Male', Haa Alifu Atoll, Haa Dhaalu Atoll, Male' Atoll, Thaa Atoll, Laamu Atoll and Addu Atoll. Five observers were to be present in the atolls while one would remain in Male'.

In Male' Mohamed Nasheed (Anni) came second in the election with 6,761 votes and he won a seat as did Ilyas Ibrahim, president's brother-in-law, who came number one with 9,566 votes. However, there is evidence that Anni came first in the election. People who were involved in the counting process say that Anni was leading by a large margin when the counting was stopped. After that only an inner circle made the decisions and announced the results.

It is evident that the regime was in a Catch-22 situation during this election. Anni was a popular journalist who had been imprisoned several times for criticizing the regime. His logo during the 1999 election was a Sangu, a conch shell. This brought back memories of Sangu, a magazine that was shut down by the regime in 1990 because of heavy criticism contained in the articles published in it. Anni was an editor of the magazine.

If Anni won Malé seat with many votes it would have been a symbol of the public's dissatisfaction with the regime. On the other hand Ilyas Ibrahim was not a favorite of the inner circle, the group in the cabinet closest to the President. In 1993 Ilyas made a secret bid for presidency and since then he has not been a favorite of even President Gayoom. He is kept as a member of the cabinet only because he is the brother of First Lady Nasreena. It is said that Nasreena exerts a lot of pressure on Gayoom and influences political decisions.

If Ilyas won the parliamentary election with many votes, it would have showed that his power had grown, and that many people in the public were behind him. This could also be taken as a sign that the inner circle was now weaker than Ilyas. After Ilyas' secret bid for presidency in 1993, he was sidelined, he was stripped of ministerial position and he was convicted in court. It was only a couple of years later that he was allowed to return from Singapore and given the post of transport minister.

So there were two people who were not chosen favorites of the regime but believed to lead in the election. If the regime tampered with the results and announced that two other candidates won, then it could have led to a public outcry. Anni was too popular and the public opinion showed it. Ilyas, using his political clout and connections with the business community, was also a formidable candidate.

Hence there was a delay in announcing the results. In the end Ilyas was declared number one, according to some sources, because of pressure from First Lady. Perhaps the inner circle thought that they could still control Ilyas because he was very much weakened after the 1993 crisis, but letting Anni come first was a greater evil.

It is ironic because when Anni first started campaigning, the regime tried to spread rumors about him and tried to weaken his campaign. However, when they realized that he was too popular, some members of the inner circle even tried to help him, hoping that his emergence will be a way of countering Ilyas. Anni was no friend of Ilyas; in 1990 Sangu played a pivotal role in exposing the excessive corruption of Ilyas, the then second-most-powerful man in the Maldives. The regime might also have had the hope that Ilyas will be defeated in the election by the regime-sponsored candidates.

In this particular election the inner circle were also weary of Mr Abdullah Kamaaludeen, the labor minister, who also contested. Kamaaludeen is said to have collaborated with Ilyas in 1993, and he was also stripped of his cabinet post. Kamaaludeen was a MP for Malé at the time and he later won the seat again in the parliamentary election of 1994. By then he was seen as an opponent of the regime, and his agenda included numerous promises of reform. Those promises were never delivered and by the time 1999 elections arrived Kamaaludeen was given back a cabinet post, he now belonged to the regime, but the public were fed up with him.

The inner circle did not trust him entirely because of his former connections with Ilyas. In fact he was given back a cabinet post also because he was a member of parliament and his vote counted in the Presidential Elections. So Gayoom's brothers Abdullah Hameed and Abdullah Yameen, both cabinet ministers, sponsored Abdul Sameeu Hassan, a principal of a school in Malé. Sameeu was then the principal of Ahmadiyaa School which is based in Machangoalhi Ward of Male'. Yameen had much political power in this ward, and it was no secret that he was sponsoring Sameeu.

In the campaign Kamaaludeen was not entirely dismissed by the regime. He was assisted even though there was a lot of mistrust, enhanced by Ilyas' open support for Kamaaludeen during the election. Nevertheless, Kamaaludeen was able to get into a slightly better position because some people thought he was a government candidate. The fact that both Ilyas and Kamaaludeen were ministers helped them because some people who were sympathetic with the regime supported them. The influence they had through the machinery of the government was immense. A lot of money was also involved.

Kamaludheen came third in the election with 6,561 votes. Some sources say that it was Kamaaludeen who came second in the election with Anni being number one. To give a seat to Ilyas, the results were tampered with and Kamasaludeen put into third position. Whatever is the truth, it is evident that the delay in announcing the results for Malé in 1999 election was caused by altering of the results.

The group of foreign observers met with the media at Dharubaaruge on 22 November 1999 and declared the election that was held as

being free and fair. They said all arrangements concerning the election were well-organized, the people had voted freely to the candidates they supported, and that this indicates that the people were aware of their constitutional rights in voting and recognized the importance of the voting process. The observers also noted that the government had brought the reforms proposed by observers after the presidential election of 1998.

The observer who visited Haa Dhaalu Atoll went to 3 inhabited islands out of the 17 inhabited islands in the atoll; the observer for Male' Atoll went to 2 inhabited islands out of 9 inhabited islands in the atoll; and the observer for Laamu Atoll visited 5 inhabited islands out of the 17 inhabited islands.

Naturally, the observers did not encounter the cases of fraud and government-led intimidation and detention of the people. A very famous case is that of Umar Jamal, a candidate for Gaafu Dhaalu Atoll, who was detained on false charges till the election was over.

Miadhu, another local daily, reported on 24 November 1999 that under a Presidential Decree the High Court of Maldives was declared as the court which will look into disputes concerning elections. This decree was made as the Article 135 of the constitution says complaints concerning parliamentary elections could be filed only in the form of a case filed at a court that the President assigns to look into disputes regarding elections.

### ***Naturally, the group of foreign observers did not encounter the cases of fraud and government-led intimidation and detention of the people.***

The Article 29 of the Law on General Elections says any complaint regarding the election should be filed within one month after the election is held. Hence, for the General Election of 1999, which was held on 19 November, complaints had to be filed at the High Court by 19 December 1999.

Several cases were filed at the High Court about the election of 1999 but they could not be proved.

Interestingly many cases involved Gaafu Dhaalu Atoll where Minister of Justice (Seena) Ahmed Zahir contested. Zahir lost while his rival and next-door neighbor Abbas Ibrahim, who is President Gayoom's brother-in-law, won a seat.

There is an indication that some people in the regime tried to encourage the idea that there was fraud in the voting in Gaafu Dhaalu Atoll, perhaps hoping that a re-election will take place there. Abbas is a rival of the inner circle of the regime comprising of Foreign Minister Fathullah Jameel, Minister of Atolls Administration Abdullah Hameed and Minister of Youth and Sports Zahir Hussain.

In the column Dhevana Visnevumakah (For a Second Thought) published in Haveeru, a paper owned by Zahir Hussain, and written by Justice Minister 'Seena' Zahir under the pseudonym Alifu, hints of fraud in the election of 1999 were given. This was perhaps to prepare the public for a re-election in certain constituencies so that

more favorable candidates could win.

However, there was no re-election and the election results remained the same.

Barely two years after the election Mohamed Nasheed, the popular MP from Male', was framed on petty theft charges and convicted.

## **By-election of 2002**

In 2002 by-election of Male' Kamaaludeen was more clearly a government candidate. There were more candidates who were seen as anti-regime and the regime had to bring to the front a person whose chances of winning were high. Kamaaludeen had the advantage of using the vast machinery of the government as he was a minister. Even a simple request to a civil servant to join the campaign must be heeded, or else there would be difficulties. But there are brave people in the Maldives who said openly to Kamaaludeen that they could not vote a government candidate.

A lot of money was involved once again. Youth, especially those from sports clubs, were mobilized using money. They were given incentives such as sports equipment, mobile phones and often hard cash. If an independent commission were formed to investigate the results of this by-election they will find many irregularities and outright corruption.

Kamaaludeen's win was described by the government-controlled media as an overwhelming victory for him. There was a few hundred votes of difference between him and the candidate who came next, but this is irrelevant because of the fact that more than 60 percent of the people who were eligible to vote opted to stay home. This is a fact clearly evident even from the official statistics published in newspapers. But the regime's media tried to play down the significance of it. But this fact was highlighted in [maldivesculture.com](http://maldivesculture.com), an independent website.

"Only 38% of Malé's 25,495 eligible voters took part in the election, according to a report in the Maldives evening newspaper, Haveeru. This may be the lowest voter participation rate in Maldivian history.

Voting took place in damp weather, with constant drizzle. Haveeru attempted to blame the low turnout on this weather, but for many potential voters the drizzle was simply a sign of the sadness of the day," the website reported.

### ***Barely two years after the election Mohamed Nasheed, the popular MP from Male', was framed on petty theft charges and convicted.***

The people were fed up of the elections because the candidate they voted with high hopes in 1999 elections - Mohamed Nasheed - was framed in a petty theft case and wrongfully banished to an island in Raa Atoll. People no longer had any faith in the election process and that it could bring a change to their lives.

Interestingly there were many candidates the regime did not like in the by-election of 2002, held to elect a person for the seat vacated after Anni's banishment. There was Umar Naseer, a

former Sergeant of National Security Services (NSS), the government branch that consists of the armed forces, fire fighters, coast guard and police. Naseer quit from NSS or was forced to leave and then formed his own security and fire safety company. People of his rank rarely leave NSS because of the privileges they enjoy. He was seen by some circles of the regime as a challenger. Later he tried to start a submarine business but this was met with prolonged bureaucratic hurdles before he was granted permission after a few years. The public also did not favor him because he was a torturer while in NSS. [Maldivesculture.com](http://Maldivesculture.com) was wrong in saying that he was a torturer in the regime of former President Nasir. In fact, whatever cruelty that Naseer had inflicted upon prisoners was done during the regime of none other than the current president. Some people say Naseer was fired from NSS after one of his torture cases was exposed.

There are some indications that the by-election of 2002 was also rigged. Kamaaludeen received 2,967 votes, 30% of total votes cast. Yoosuf Rafeeu, a comedian known by his nickname Yoosay came second with 2,076 votes. Even though Yoosay was very popular in early 1990s his popularity had declined by 2000. His campaign was also not very strong in 2002 compared to his campaign in 1989 in which he was seen as a formidable opponent of the regime. In fact, many people believe that Yoosay also really won a seat in 1989 but was dismissed in the official results to bring Ilyas Ibrahim to parliament.

Many people doubt that Yoosay could have received more votes than Ms Zahiya Zareer, who was also quite popular in the 2002 by-election. Zahiya came third with 1,688 votes. Equally puzzling is the low number of votes received by former presidential candidates Mohamed Ibrahim Haleem (457 votes), Mohamed Shareef (109 votes) and Nazeer Jamal (44 votes). Weak campaign may be a reason for the low number of votes for Jamal and Shareef but in case of Haleem there was a modest campaign.

The votes received by the three former presidential candidates may have been altered intentionally to decrease their political credibility. Nazeer Jamal, a brother of Umar Jamal, was having trouble with the Elections Commission previously for having written 'former Presidential candidate' in his business card. He was arrested for that 'offence'. Shareef was also arrested and imprisoned in 1990 for allegedly recording a phone conversation between Ilyas Ibrahim and an official of Fisheries Projects Implementation Department (FPID) that implicated the two men in the most famous corruption case of the country. Yoosay was also arrested back then for distributing the tape of the phone conversation that Shareef allegedly recorded.

People believe that Ali Asim, a candidate who ran in the recent elections, received more votes this time (1,203 votes) because people were mocking the electoral system. Asim normally leads a solitary campaign, with his poster in his bicycle and photocopies of his poster pasted on walls. This time he received more assistance in the campaign when people volunteered to make billboards for him.

As time passes the fraud in the by-election of Male' in 2002 will come to light. Meanwhile, the people remain disillusioned with the electoral

system.

## Rigging elections

Rigging elections is common in the Maldives. Like Zimbabwe, in the Maldives also people who are opponents of the regime are bullied and sometimes put in prison on false charges.

An example is Umar Jamal, a candidate for Gaafu Dhaalu Atoll in the parliamentary election of 1999, who was imprisoned during the campaign for a charge that the regime made up and could not subsequently prove. According to the first issue of Sandhaanu, Umar Jamal was kept in prison for 7 months for investigations. For another 2 months he was kept in Malé without giving permission to leave Malé. Jamal was imprisoned following a complaint by a woman. Later the woman refused to stand by her accusations and told people that it was the administrative officials in the atoll who forced her to make the false accusations.

Jamal had a good chance of winning a seat. But for that atoll there were big shots contesting, such as the justice minister (Seena) Ahmed Zahir and Abbas Ibrahim, brother-in-law of President Gayoom. Jamal was neatly kept out of the way till the election was over.

"I was charged with attempting to discredit the government," Jamal told the Washington Times. A Washington Times report on Maldives (<http://www.internationalreports.net/asiapacific/maldives/2002/thequestion.html>) details the incident as following:

"A rival candidate closely linked to the government alleged that Jamal had said that "although this is called a democracy, it is a kingdom and there is no freedom." Jamal says he was detained in solitary confinement for three months, and since then has been tried three times in both the lower and the higher courts, "once in the Higher Court without my being present," he says.

Jamal is being held in an extended system of parole-like restrictions in the absence of a conviction: "Three years later they still hold my passport ... and I have to submit to monthly checks." Jamal is still waiting for a resolution of his case."

Jamal was later sentenced to six months of house arrest, probably after the interview was published, to justify the actions of the regime and challenge the fact that there was no case against him.

### ***Rigging elections is common in the Maldives. Like Zimbabwe, in the Maldives also people who are opponents of the regime are bullied and sometimes put in prison on false charges.***

Ahmed Ibrahim Didi from Hulhudhoo island in Addu Atoll ran as a candidate for a seat of Addu Atoll. According to the first issue of Sandhaanu it was the popularity he received that prompted the regime to send him to Dhoonidhoo, a separate island prison. He was kept there till the election was over. It is not clear during which election this had happened but it could have been during the election of 1994 in which he

received 1,789 votes and came fourth among 14 candidates. There were big shots contesting with him including the Attorney General Dr Mohamed Munawwar, who won a seat and came first in the election. Ironically, Ahmed Didi is now also in prison, this time for his involvement in the underground email newsletter Sandhaanu.

In the Maldives also votes are cast in the names of people who do not actually vote, for example in the name of seamen who are employed at ships overseas. There is a lot of fraud of the vote registers. Sometimes ballot boxes are stuffed with false votes with the voters unaware of it.

The influence of the island or atoll level officials is critical in determining the outcome of the elections. The Island Chiefs and Atoll Chiefs are carefully picked people who are trustworthy to the regime. Abdullah Hameed, the atolls minister and brother of President Gayoom, ensures that those officials are obedient people by providing them with numerous incentives.

The influence that those officials exert on elections varies, from subtle suggestions to direct orders to vote for a certain candidate. In extreme cases the very process of the election is ignored when Island Chiefs, the administrative officials in the islands, tell people that the voting has been completed and instruct them to go home. The poor people return home without voting.

Island Chiefs and Atoll Chiefs' influence in elections prevent a fair election in the atolls. People who are known to be critics have been prevented from voting. If a person reports such a case, then the case is not investigated further. Anybody who clashes with local officials over their instructions concerning voting ends up in a cell in the Island Office, or is brought to Malé to be imprisoned.

### ***In the Maldives also votes are cast in the names of people who do not actually vote, for example in the name of seamen who are employed at ships overseas.***

Complaints were filed in parliamentary elections of 1989, 1994 and 1999. Only very few complaints were investigated. According to the first issue of Sandhaanu about 60 complaints came from atolls regarding the election of 1999. Sandhaanu said a trial could not be held at High Court concerning a complaint by a candidate from Shaviyani Atoll because the candidate could not afford to pay a very large amount of money as a deposit. Sandhaanu also pointed out that Ibrahim Shareef, who was a former MP from Addu Atoll, filed several complaints (regarding the election of 1999) but he was imprisoned for several months and banished as a result.

According to the second issue of Sandhaanu the people of Veymandoo island in Thaa Atoll seized the Island Chief during the parliamentary election of 1999 because he was casting false votes into the ballot boxes. Sandhaanu says the people reacted violently, vandalizing the Island Office and a van used by the office. The ballot box was sunk into the sea. The Island Chief was allegedly tied to a mast of a dhoni. Sandhaanu says NSS troops arrived in a Coast Guard vessel, and arrested several people,

including a candidate. They were kept in prison for a long time and then banished.

An interesting thing is that, after voting, the ballot boxes from some atolls are carried back to Malé in fish collecting vessels of Maldives Industrial Fisheries Company (MIFCO). There is no reason why the boxes could not be carried by air from Addu Atoll or Gaafu Dhaalu Atoll because both atolls have domestic airports. But in parliamentary elections and presidential elections the ballot boxes from Addu, Fuamulah and Gaafu Dhaalu are brought back in MIFCO vessels. They arrive about three days later by which time the results of most other atolls are announced. Some analysts believe this is done to tamper with the votes from those atolls and balance any votes that the regime lose from other atolls. Another reason maybe that the said atolls have more opponents and there is the possibility that the percentage of the votes in favor of the regime may be low. Whatever is the reason, it is apparent that the time it takes for the ballot boxes to reach Malé by sea in MIFCO vessels is used for ulterior motives.

The election of 1999 was held on 19 November but even by 21 November the ballot boxes of the four southernmost atolls and Thaa Atoll had not reached Malé.

The vote rigging includes outright cheating of ignorant people as indicated by the joke 'bodu kaafu kuda kaafu'. It is said the Island Chiefs tell the people that if they like a particular candidate put a bodu (large) kaafu (a letter of the Thaana alphabet resembling a checkmark) next to the name of the candidate. The 'bodu kaafu' stands for 'kamudhey' or liking the candidate. If they don't like that candidate, they are told, to put a kuda (small) kaafu. The 'kuda kaafu' stands for 'kamakunudehy' or disliking the candidate. Either way it resembles a checkmark. There is another version of this joke that says the people are told to put a checkmark if they like the candidate and to put a 'kuda kaafu' if they don't.

This joke seems to have originated concerning the Presidential election in which only one candidate is put forward to public referendum. The people have the option of putting a checkmark or a cross.

The method of voting in parliamentary election differs from time to time, sometimes putting a checkmark against the candidates, at other times writing candidates' names.

Foreign observers from respected international institutes are not brought to observe the elections. Sometimes observers from neighboring countries are brought to bring a look of fairness to the election but their authenticity is doubtful. They are given access to few islands where a feeling of fair elections is showed. It is doubtful that they are able to communicate openly with the masses in the islands and even if so any grievances will not come to surface because the observers will be allowed to speak to carefully selected people. In any case even the translators are chosen people. The credibility of the observers themselves is also questionable.

If all the above tactics fail, then the Elections Commissioner appointed by the President and the few people who are playing the game could always tamper with the results and announce the victory for the candidates they favor. Life is so smooth in the Maldives.



















# Action



Let the international community be aware of the election rigging and fraud in the Maldives. Please write to the following organisations detailing the election fraud in the Maldives. Send them a copy of this issue of this magazine.

Ask the government of Maldives to bring the following international organisations to observe the forthcoming presidential election. These organisations have experience in election monitoring and are respected by the international community. If the government of the Maldives wants a fair and free election there is no reason why these organisations should not be invited to observe the election. Let these organisations also be aware of election rigging incidents in the Maldives. Send them a copy of this issue of this magazine.

Center for Voting and Democracy  
6930 Carroll Ave., Suite 610  
Takoma Park, MD 20912  
USA  
Phone: (301) 270-4616  
Fax: (301) 270-4133  
E-mail: cvd@fairvote.org

Carlyle Hooff  
Chief Operating Officer  
Freedom House  
1319 18th Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20036  
USA  
phone: (202)296-5101  
fax: (202)296-5078  
e-mail: hooff@freedomhouse.org

The Carter Center  
Public Information Office  
One Copenhill  
453 Freedom Parkway  
Atlanta, GA 30307  
USA  
e-mail: carterweb@emory.edu

Transparency International  
Unit 1, The Quadrangle  
49 Atlanta Street  
London, SW6 6TU  
United Kingdom  
Phone: +44-20 7610 1400  
Fax: +44-20 7610 1550  
e-mail: London-Office@transparency.org

The Commonwealth Secretariat,  
Marlborough House, Pall Mall,  
London SW1Y 5HX  
United Kingdom  
Phone: +44 (0)20 77476500  
Fax: +44 (0)20 7930 0827  
e-mail: info@commonwealth.int

Keenan Howell  
Press Officer  
International Foundation for Election Systems  
1101 15th Street, NW  
Third Floor  
Washington, DC 20005  
USA  
phone: (202) 828-8507  
fax: (202)452-0804  
e-mail: khowell@ifes.org

The Center for Democracy  
1101 15th Street, NW  
Suite 505  
Washington, DC 20005  
USA  
Phone: (202) 429-9141  
Fax: (202) 293-1768

International Election Observation Mission  
1101 15th Street, NW  
Suite 505  
Washington, DC 20005  
USA  
Phone: (202) 429-9141  
Fax: (202) 293-1768  
E-mail: info@international-election-observation.org

Center for International Election Assistance  
1101 15th Street, NW  
Suite 505  
Washington, DC 20005  
USA  
Phone: (202) 429-9141  
Fax: (202) 293-1768  
E-mail: info@ciea.gov

International Foundation for Electoral Systems  
1101 15th Street, NW  
Third Floor  
Washington, DC 20005  
USA  
Phone: (202) 828-8507  
Fax: (202) 452-0804  
E-mail: khowell@ifes.org

# Dissident Watch

Ibrahim Luthfee, who was serving a life sentence for his part in the underground newsletter Sandhaanu, has fled from a hotel in Sri Lanka. Luthfee was taken abroad for a medical treatment. Despite doctors' advise to take Luthfee abroad urgently to treat a damaged eye, the government delayed sending him. The Maldivian police are hunting Luthfee in Sri Lanka. We

urge you not to cooperate with the police search for Luthfee. Please provide any assistance you can concerning Luthfee's safety.

Mohamed Zaki, Ahmed Ibrahim Didi are serving life sentences in prison for making Sandhaanu, an underground newsletter. Fathimath Nishreen is serving a ten-year sentence for her involvement in Sandhaanu. Please write to international human rights organizations asking them to press for the release of those prisoners of

conscience.

Ibrahim Fareded Ahmed, who was arrested in June 2002, is believed to be held at Dhoonidhoo under detention. After being arrested for a religious lecture he delivered, containing political undertones, he has still not been brought to a trial. Please press the Maldivian government to provide him with a free trial and free him. Please write to international human rights organizations about this prisoner of conscience.

Zimbabwe's political background is very similar to the Maldives. Both countries have election fraud and election rigging done by the ruling government to increase their chances of staying in power. Both countries are ruled by power-hungry dictators. Both rulers have ruled their respective countries for a long period.

Elections are held in both countries to make the power of the ruling elite legitimate. However, elections do not reflect the true will of the people. Both countries suppress free media and civil society.

But there are some differences as well. In Zimbabwe opposition parties exist whereas there are no political parties in the Maldives. Zimbabwe is facing pressure from the international community to bring reforms while the extent of human rights abuse and curtailing of democracy in the Maldives is relatively unknown to the rest of the world.

Both countries invited foreign observers for the last presidential elections. In case of Maldives, no reputed international organisations were invited. Organisations such as The Commonwealth observed the election in Zimbabwe and gave an accurate picture of what happened. If a well-known election monitoring body were to observe elections in the Maldives, their findings would not have been very different from this report below.



# Preliminary Report of the Commonwealth Observer Group to the Presidential Election in Zimbabwe 9 – 10 March 2002

Publication date: 3/14/2002

Four decades ago, the Commonwealth dedicated itself to work collectively towards bringing about democracy to the countries of southern Africa. This commitment remains true today and applies to the crisis affecting Zimbabwe.

It was in this spirit that Commonwealth countries engaged with Zimbabwe at Abuja last year to help resolve the land issue. It was also in this spirit that the Commonwealth accepted the invitation of the Government of Zimbabwe to send observers to the 2002 Presidential election.

The Commonwealth Observer Group consists of 42 Observers and 19 staff from the Commonwealth Secretariat. Our terms of reference enjoin us to consider the various factors impinging on the credibility of the electoral process as a whole and to determine in our judgement whether the conditions existed for a free expression of will by the electors and if the results of the elections reflect the wishes of the people of Zimbabwe.

Our teams returned to Harare yesterday, 13 March, from their deployment to the ten provinces of the country. We carried out a thorough de-briefing during which we discussed not only what took place on the election days (9 – 11 March) but the electoral system, the legal framework, the political background and most importantly the campaign period leading up to the elections.

We shall be submitting a full Report of our findings, conclusions and recommendations to the Commonwealth Secretary-General. This Report will be made public in due course. In the meantime, we would like to make a short preliminary statement on our observations.

We were deeply impressed by the determination of the people of Zimbabwe to exercise their democratic rights, very often under difficult conditions. At polling stations across the coun-

try, voters queued patiently and peacefully, and sometimes for very long hours. We were also impressed by the professionalism and conscientiousness of the majority of the polling staff, many of whom also had to work for very long hours without rest.

However, it was clear to us that while the actual polling and counting processes were peaceful and the secrecy of the ballot was assured, the Presidential election in Zimbabwe was marred by a high level of politically motivated violence and intimidation, which preceded the poll. While violent acts were carried out by supporters of both of the main political parties, it is our view that most of these were perpetrated by members / supporters of the ruling party against members / supporters of the opposition.

We were particularly concerned about the activities of paramilitary youth groups organised under a 'National Youth Training Programme'. Members of these groups were responsible for a systematic campaign of intimidation against known or suspected supporters of the main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change, MDC. The violence and intimidation created a climate of fear and suspicion.

Members of our Group found that very often the police did not take action to investigate reported cases of violence and intimidation, especially against known or suspected supporters of the MDC. Indeed, they appeared to be high-handed in dealing with the MDC and lenient towards supporters of the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front, ZANU-PF. This failure to impartially enforce the law seriously calls into question the application of the rule of law in Zimbabwe.

We were concerned that the legislative framework within which the elections were conducted, particularly certain provisions of the Public Order and Security Act and the General Laws Amendment Act, was basically flawed. Limitations on the freedom of speech, movement and

of association prevented the opposition from campaigning freely.

We further regret the restrictions placed on civil society groups, which effectively barred this important sector from participation in the democratic process. In particular we consider that unnecessary restrictions were placed on the deployment of independent domestic observers.

We also found that thousands of Zimbabwean citizens were disenfranchised as a result of the lack of transparency in the registration process and the wide discretionary powers of the Registrar-General in deciding who is included in or omitted from the electoral register.

It is our view that the ruling party used its incumbency to exploit state resources for the benefit of its electoral campaign. This was compounded by the Government's near monopoly of the broadcast media – a factor which was not offset by the bias of most of the privately-owned print media in favour of the opposition MDC.

On polling day itself, many who wanted to cast their vote could not do so because of a significant reduction in the number of polling stations in urban areas. There was an inexplicable delay in complying with a High Court order to extend voting to 11 March. Voting in Harare and Chitungwiza was especially slow, leading to many voters being turned away even at the end of the third day. These problems were not evident in the rural areas.

All the foregoing brings us to the conclusion that the conditions in Zimbabwe did not adequately allow for a free expression of will by the electors.

In these circumstances, we call on all Zimbabweans to put aside their differences and to work together for the future of their country. We believe the Commonwealth should assist in the process of national reconciliation.

