CHAPTER - V

Religious Extremism And Challenges To The Political Order
Introduction

Being a small atoll island state, Maldives has always been vulnerable to external and internal threats. There have been instances of political disturbances and coup attempts in the past decades. This chapter will analyse the factors of insecurity from a socio-political perspective, emphasising the rise of religious extremism, political disorder and coups. It will examine how the centralisation of state power and lack of liberal democracy until 2008 generated an atmosphere conducive to coup attempts. The rise of religious extremism is a grave security concern for this tiny nation, and this chapter will analyse this against the backdrop of the 2007 Sultan Park bombing and detention of Maldivian jihadis in the region. The new functional democracy introduced in Maldives during the last five years has created a threat for political order and stability, with the freedom of expression resulting in discord between different groups, inciting violence and extremism. This chapter will also deal with the changes brought into the social life and politics in Maldives by the increasing spread of radical Islam. The relationship between high prevalence of unemployment, poverty and the lack of social welfare policies and their impact on the growth of religious extremism also finds a detailed analysis in this chapter.

Maldives, being a Muslim nation with pressing problems of unemployment and drug abuse among its youth, is a budding base for the growth of religious extremism, influenced by radical Islam imported from Pakistan and Arab countries. After the killing of Osama bin Laden and stronger actions initiated by the governments in the South Asian region, the terrorist groups are looking for other pastures to set up their base and to recruit cadres. Maldives is one such target. Maldives has already witnessed three well-known coup attempts in 1980, 1983 and 1988. The third attempt was the most serious one and required India’s intervention to thwart it. The conditions and reasons for such coup attempts are still persisting. This has been amply demonstrated in the events of February 2012, prior to and after the dramatic “resignation” of the former President Mohamed “Anni” Nasheed. There is also the possibility of the Somali pirates attempting to take
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over some of the uninhabited islands. Their attack in early 2011 on the Mahe port in Seychelles is a vivid case in point. With this background, this chapter will analyse the conditions in Maldives both in a historic and the prevailing context, and will also look into the possibilities of such coup attempts and the repercussions of the rise of religious extremism in Maldives.

THE PROBLEM OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM

A rising surge of religious extremism is driving Maldives down the road to a new conservatism. The spread of militant Islam in the country and the appeal of a radical strain of Islam are drawing Maldivian youth, who are mostly unemployed, into global jihadi groups particularly influenced by the Pakistani madrassas. “Hundreds of Maldivians” have been recruited by the Taliban and are fighting in Pakistan, Maldivian President Mohammed Nasheed told a local news channel during his visit to India in late 2009. “They are even dying in action in Afghanistan and Kashmir”.

Maldives has been in the grip of political turmoil and transition for some years now. Opposition to President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom’s authoritarian rule exploded in mass demonstrations for democratic reform from 2003 onwards, which the government sought to crush with a heavy hand. The Maldives thereafter with the help of international community adopted a new constitution, held multi-party presidential and parliamentary elections – which Gayoom lost eventually in 2008 – and set up an independent judiciary, a commission for human rights and implemented other administrative reforms.

But, as there are always two sides to a coin, the new democratic setup in Maldives has thrown up serious challenges particularly in the realm of religious extremism. Maldivians are Sunni Muslims; and only Muslims can be citizens of the country. Historically, religion has been an important part of their daily life; but the Islam followed here was never rigid. Maldivian Islam is suffused with local cultural practices and faith in Islam has coexisted with belief in djinns (spirits) (Ramachandran, March 2009).

1 A friend of such jihadis informed this researcher during an interview in Male’ on 8 March 2011.
Alongside praying to Allah, Maldivians used to turn to magic and spells for protection against evil spirits.

Traditionally, women did not veil their faces or cover their heads and men did not grow a beard. This researcher was told in an interview that wearing a veil on a woman’s face is an offence under a law enacted during the Gayoom’s regime (1978-2008). Interaction between men and women was common; and arranged marriages, practised in most Islamic societies, was never the norm here. That is now changing. A new form of Islam has taken root. Signs of conservatism are more evident on the streets of the capital Malé today than they were even a few years ago. The number of burqa-wearing women has been increasing steadily, as that of bearded men, who follow Wahhabism, a particular orientation within Salafism, an orientation which some consider ultra-conservative and heretical.

These religious conservatives have become increasingly assertive. And the ongoing efforts by the government to revise the penal code have come under intense opposition from a small but vocal section that wants sharia law punishments like the death penalty, flogging and amputations to be included in the rulings. Several public demonstrations supporting flogging have taken place in Malé in recent years and those who have spoken against it have been threatened. Among those demanding the inclusion of sharia punishments in the revised penal code is the Adhaalath (Justice) Party, a constituent of the ruling coalition, which controls the Ministry of Islamic Affairs. Many describe it as an extremist party. But more extreme than Adhaalath are organisations outside parliament, like the Jamiiyyathul Salaf. Registered as a non-governmental organisation with the Ministry of Home Affairs and set up to “raise religious awareness and promote the values of Islam”, the Jamiiyyathul Salaf is actively engaged in spreading Salafi Islam in the Maldives. In 2008, it declared music to be haram (forbidden) and forced the closing of a school library in Malé that had “Christian story books”. It has also started inviting preachers from abroad like Abu Ameena Bilal Philips, a hard-line Islamic preacher from Jamaica who endorses girls being married off when they attain puberty and...
defends the use of the death penalty for homosexuality (Ramachandran ,2009). In April 2011, he was ordered to leave Germany, where he went to address his followers; and has become a persona non grata (Borrud, 2011).

Some Maldivian social activists, with whom this researcher interacted, acknowledged that “there is no evidence yet” directly linking organisations like Adhaalath and Salaf with armed violence. It is mainly to the Maldivian way of life that these organisations pose a threat: the people could lose the liberal, secular and tolerant way of life that they have enjoyed for centuries. The popular support for these organisations is still limited. Adhaalath, for instance, failed to win even a single seat in the last general elections: but they are very effective in intimidation and name-calling, by labelling their critics as anti-Islam.

How Radical Islam Emerged in Maldives

The roots of the religious extremism visible in the Maldives today can be traced to Gayoom’s policies. His government kept a tight rein on expressions of Islamic extremism and even on Islamic preaching. In suppressed societies underground movements flourish. Religious extremists are far more effective at organising themselves underground: the Quran is their manifesto. Gayoom’s government had a band of selected preachers on Islam. Public meetings had also to be approved by the government, which decided the person, place, time and even the contents of the speech. Public statements contrary to government policy or to the government’s interpretation of Islam were legally prohibited. It is alleged that people who were against the government’s views on religion were tortured in prisons and some were banished to faraway islands; that men were shaved of their beard using chilli sauce in place of shaving cream. This created a condition where the people were not allowed to read any other materials on religious matters according to their wish and thus hampering free interpretation of Islam on the basis of their own understanding. This severely curtailed their knowledge and expression in religious matters.
But during the initial stages of the democratic movement in 2003, Gayoom – wary of his political future, wanted to take some credit on religious matters and started to implement his “Islamification” policies. Though he had been a moderate, having studied at the world-famous Al-Azhar University in Egypt, he started Arabic-medium schools and replaced the liberal Islamic textbooks with a stricter version of Islam. Their students went abroad to study in Islamic universities in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Flushed with Saudi funds and supporters, they returned home to preach a more rigid form of Islam that is alien to Maldives. There has been a growing trend in Islamic conservatism ever since the advent of democracy and free speech.

Acknowledging that many students from the Maldives were going to madrassas in Pakistan and their parents were largely unaware of their whereabouts or what they were being taught, former President Nasheed during a seminar organised in Delhi pointed out that because of the limited educational opportunities in the Maldives, the madrassas in Pakistan were an attractive option. Maldivians who have gone to Saudi and Pakistani madrassas, especially Jamia Salafia Islamia at Faisalabad, which has produced several al-Qaeda and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) leaders, have been drawn into jihadi networks. The Maldivians’ involvement in the global jihadi network received a fillip in 2005 when the LeT’s charitable front, the Idara Khidmat-e-Khalq (IKK), began engaging in relief operations in the Maldives following the tsunami. Scores of Maldivian boys were recruited through the IKK and sent to seminaries in Pakistan (Ramachandran, 2009).

Radicalisation of the Youth and its Manifestation as a Security Threat

Several Maldivians have been arrested in recent years for terrorism-related activities or en route to training or fighting in Pakistan and Afghanistan. In April 2011, nine Maldivians were arrested with weapons near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. A fortnight earlier, three Maldivians were arrested for illegally entering the Waziristan

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2 Seminar was conducted by a foreign policy think tank during his maiden visit to India as President of Maldives in December 2008.
trivial area in Pakistan. Ibrahim Fauzee, the only Maldivian held in the Guantanamo Bay US detention facility in Cuba, had spent three years there. Fauzee was arrested in May 2002 in Karachi, where he was following Islamic studies, living in a suspected al-Qaeda safe house. According to leaked Wikileaks cables on the Gauantanamo prison, his telephone number was found in terrorist detainees’ pocket litter, and his telephone number was associated with a Sudanese teacher who assisted Arabs travelling to training camps in Afghanistan (Minivan News, 2011). Fauzee was subsequently released and transferred to the Maldives on 11 March 2005, where he now heads the NGO named Islamic Foundation. There have also been reports that more Maldivians are in Pakistani jails. At least two Maldivian nationals are known to have died fighting in Kashmir in early 2007. On 27 April 2010, the Indian Minister of State for Home Affairs, Ajay Maken, told the Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament) in a written reply that LeT was making concerted efforts to develop links in Maldives and other neighbouring countries (Times of India, 28 April 2010).

In September 2007, Maldives witnessed its first terrorist attack when a bomb went off in Sultan Park in Malé. Twelve tourists sustained minor injuries in the explosion, which was executed both to signal Islamist opposition to the government and to cripple the nation’s economy. Designed using a low-grade explosive, the device was similar in its construction to those that went off in the cities of Ajmer and Hyderabad in India, barring a switch to prevent accidental detonation — a response to the high incidence of wrong-number calls in Maldives’ mobile networks prevalent at that time (Minivan News). Though the impact of the explosion was minimal, it got international attention mainly because of the foreign tourists present in the park at the time of the explosion.

Asked about the bomb blast in Malé and religious extremism, former President Nasheed while on a visit to India in December 2008 said that when there was room for centrist political parties, Islamist extremists lost ground because “we (democrats) occupied most of the available political space” (Dikshit, 2008). The process was helped by the centrist parties convincing some Islamic parties to join the democratic mainstream.
In the general elections too, Islamic parties did not get many votes. Nasheed also cautioned at that time saying, “But there are groups people have to be vigilant about. The government will observe them.”

Now there are also increasing concerns particularly in India, that jihadis in the archipelago, 400 km off India’s western shore, could use its remote uninhabited islands as safe havens. Proximity to other island nations, busy shipping lanes and wide geographic stretch compound the danger. According to some Indian intelligence reports, some terror outfits are trying to infiltrate mainland India through Andaman via Maldives (The Hindu, December 2011). A US terror alert in 2010 indicated the possibility of LeT already having some 200 cadres present in Sri Lanka who planned to use the country as a “staging ground” to enter India: they are possibly “planners and facilitators” currently engaged in building a network. Another US assessment suggests that LeT is looking to strengthen its presence in Nepal and Maldives (Vasudevan, 2010).

**The External Connection of Growing Extremism**

The 2007 Sultan Park bombing had a typical Maldives-Pakistani terror network connection. According to the investigators, a group of local residents linked to the ultra-right Jamaat Ahl-e-Hadis sect, working from a makeshift one-room mosque, planned the bombing. Rejecting liturgical practices at the state-run mosques, the group argued that the mainstream Sunni Islam promoted by President Gayoom’s regime was heretical, and the regime itself was illegitimate. Behind their campaign, investigators believe, were the massive resources of Pakistan and West Asia-based Islamist networks. Among the key figures who planned the bombing was Saeed Ahmed, a leading ideologue. Ahmed, who was a key participant in the 2004 street protests against President Gayoom’s regime, left for Pakistan several months before the bombing. His family claimed to have no knowledge of his whereabouts. Like several other Maldives Islamists, Ahmed is thought to have been linked to the Jamia Salafiya Islamia, a Faisalabad-based seminary that has
received dozens of religious students from the Maldives. It has also produced several key leaders of the LeT (The Hindu, 14 November 2007).

Several Maldives nationals are believed to have trained at LeT-run facilities in Pakistan and “many Maldivians were training there”, one of the trainees said in October 2007. In the run-up to the Sultan Park bombing, evidence emerged that these networks were intact. Maldivian national Asif Ibrahim was arrested in Kerala in April 2005, after attempting to source equipment and recruit cadres for a Malé-based terror group, the Jamaat-ul-Muslimeen. In April 2006, three Malé residents were arrested on charges of preparing to go to Pakistan to receive jihad training. Although acquitted for want of evidence, none made secret of their ideological leanings. Fatimah Nasreen, one of them, said of Osama bin Laden: “There are things I support, and things I can’t decide on” (Swami, 4 April 2009). Investigators discovered later that the Islamist cell which executed Maldives’ first-ever terror strike also had connections with LeT operatives in India. Moosa Inas, a Laamu atoll resident charged with having triggered the explosive device in the Sultan Park bombing, had travelled to Thiruvananthapuram in December 2005. Inas arrived in Kerala on a flight through Colombo, and then crossed the India-Pakistan border at Attari to meet contacts linked to the Jamia Salafiyya in Faisalabad (ibid.). At least ten key operatives, including computer engineer Abdul Latif Ibrahim and Ali Shameem, fled to Pakistan and both were on a watch list of suspects, who the Maldives government believed were preparing to receive training at Islamist facilities in Pakistan. Inas, however, was deported from Colombo along with another suspect, Ahmed Naseer, before they could catch connecting flights to Karachi. Little information on Inas’ contacts in Pakistan, where he again travelled in 2006, transiting through Colombo and Dubai, has so far been made available by the joint Maldives-US team which investigated the Sultan Park bombing. Maldivian authorities strongly believe that several suspects had escaped to Pakistan after the bombings, but were unable to secure their extradition. Evidence also suggests that LeT cadres in India were activated to support the cell of which Inas was a part (The Hindu, 16 November 2007).
Asif Ibrahim, a Maldivian national arrested in Kerala in April 2005, told Indian investigators that he had been tasked with the setting up of a support unit for the Jamaat-ul-Muslimeen in Thiruvananthapuram. Asif Ibrahim’s handlers hoped that the unit would be able to procure bomb components more easily than in Maldives, where a strict national identity card system makes such purchases vulnerable to police investigation. The LeT also activated several local operatives in support of the enterprise. Jamshedpur resident Tariq Akhtar was summoned to Dhaka in 2005, where he received orders from the Pakistan-based LeT commander Abdul Aziz to meet Islamists in Nepal, Sri Lanka and Maldives. Mumbai resident Shami Ahmad Shah was tasked with obtaining a fake passport for Akhtar. India’s intelligence services warned in 2006 of efforts by the Karachi-based mafioso Dawood Ibrahim Kaksar to set up operations in Maldives through a Dubai-based firm, Dolphin Management Services. Elements linked to the Dawood mafia are thought to have been involved in at least one effort to ship LeT terrorists to Mumbai through the Indian Ocean in 2007 (The Hindu, 16 November 2007).

Experts believe that at least some of the infrastructure for the Maldives terror cell was financed with funds provided by the Idara Khidmaq-e-Khalq (IKK), the LeT’s charity wing. The IKK, proscribed by the US and India, continues to operate legitimately in Pakistan. According to its website, the IKK spent Pakistani Rs. 17.2 million on tsunami relief in Maldives, Sri Lanka and Indonesia during 2005 — its single-largest charitable operation. Government officials in Maldives said there was no record of the IKK having registered for relief work — a sign that the funds might have been funnelled to Islamists. Similar strategies helped the LeT significantly expand its presence in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir after the earthquake of 2005. According to reports that appeared in the United Kingdom and the US media, part of the estimated $10 million raised by the IKK for earthquake relief was used to fund a 2006 plot to blow up ten transatlantic commercial flights. Finance is also coming through narcotics trade. In 2004, some persons were arrested in Tamil Nadu when they were smuggling 8 kg of heroin to Maldives (The Hindu, 2 April 2004).
IMPACT OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM ON MALDIVIAN SOCIETY

Allegiances forged in foreign seminaries such as Jamia Salafiya propelled the slow but apparently inexorable growth of neo-conservative Islam on the scattered islands of Maldives. As early as December 1999, Islamists launched incendiary attacks against the regime, arguing that the millennium celebrations planned were part of a plot to spread Christianity – this has been a constant accusation by the extremists, which has also been employed in the 2012 episodes of civil unrest. In 2003, posters appeared on the walls of a school in Edhyafushi Island praising Osama bin Laden. A Malé shop displaying a Santa Claus was attacked in 2005. By mid-2006, Islamists centred on Jamaat Ahl-e-Hadis preacher Sheikh Ibrahim Fareed succeeded in establishing a base in the south Maldives island of Himandhoo. A new mosque propagating neo-conservative Islam was set up in defiance of laws that mandate that religious institutions must be licensed. Sharia codes were imposed on residents (Swami, 4 April 2009) and efforts to act against Islamists met with resistance. The Himandhoo mosque was shut down in October 2006, but it soon revived. One government supporter on the island, Ibrahim Shameem, was murdered two months later. In June 2007, Islamists and police fought a street battle after officials attempted to close down an Islamist mosque in Malé. After the Sultan Park bombing, the government began to fight back. Police backed by troops cleared Himandhoo on 7 October, after battles, which left one officer seriously injured. In April 2009, detainees started fires in the Maafushi prison, causing damage to the health centre, a workshop, and a desalination plant. A prison raid in Maafushi revealed homemade bombs, literature about Islamic extremism, knives, mobile phones, syringes, trowels, and maps of the prison (Minivan News, 2009).

Radicalisation of the youth is also bringing disharmony in Maldivian society. One journalist’s elder brother went to Pakistan for madrassa education and spent two years there. On his return he started influencing his family members to follow things which were taught to him in Pakistan. He denounced things which are in practice in Maldives, saying those are not the original teachings of Islam. Some of his family members
surrendered to his ideas, but not his younger brother. Soon, differences started brewing between him and his family members and one day he left home. He is now cut off from his family totally. Another freelance journalist and social activist, whose support for gay rights and religious tolerance was not received well among his family members, also left home. These are very few cases of people, whose life has been affected directly on the negative side, by the religious views of their immediate family members. There is another businessman, who was unhappy with the policy of the government of not selling liquor in Malé, while it is sold widely in the resorts islands. He believes that it is a case of pseudo Islam, where the rich are investing and taking advantage of the resort system, and the average businessmen like him is not encouraged to do this business on a medium scale in other islands populated by locals. He is of the view that some of the other businesses are getting affected because of the growing radicalisation of the people. He pointed out incidents of attacks on shops selling Western outfits for women and bookshops selling Western novels. Radicalism can also be misused for anti-social activities imaginatively. There were confirmed reports that two men were spotted in the central market road in Malé city, wearing burqa (Minivan News). This shows the possibility that an “irreligious” criminal-minded men can resort to religious disguise as well. This also brings an interesting question into contention, what’s to prevent Maldivian Male criminals, who want to hide their identities, from resorting to wearing the full face veil itself - a more “harmless” mask because it is considered religious by most of the Maldivians - and then attacking someone on their hit list? Some young Maldivian men and women might use Islam as a disguise to hide their criminal activities like prostitution, heroin abuse and sale of liquor which are prohibited by law.

Rasheed, a freelance journalist, says that while there is no evidence yet of armed Islamic organisations in the Maldives, “well-connected Maldivians” told him about

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3 As told to this researcher in an interview on 3 April 2011 in Malé.

4 As told to this researcher in an interview on 4 April 2011 in Malé.
“terrorist cells operating in Maldives which can be mobilised to act the moment orders arrive from headquarters”, the headquarters possibly referring to “any extremist leader operating out of Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, etc.” (Ramachandran, March 2009). The government has been criticised for not doing enough to address the extremist problem. In November 2009, Ahmed Saleem, then president of the Human Rights Commission of Maldives, said the government’s efforts to stop religious extremism from spreading in the country were “inadequate” (Minivan News, 2009). Concern is mounting over the increasing stubbornness with which religious extremists are operating in the Maldives.

NEGATIVE IMPLICATIONS OF THE NEW DEMOCRATIC OPPORTUNITIES

The toddling steps towards democracy in Maldives have also brought some negative socio-political repercussions. The expression of orthodox beliefs and rhetoric of some religious organisations and groups in Maldives, for example, has been steadily increasing. A political party like Adhaalath and organisations like Salaf are promoting a culture that promotes jihadism. They are certainly more active under the new democratic government than they were under Gayoom’s autocratic rule. A part of the problem is the former President Nasheed’s alleged appeasement of religious parties like Adhaalath. “Unlike Gayoom, who used to jail people like controversial religious preacher Sheikh Fareed for their extremist views, under the new democratic government, extremists are able to advocate their version of Islam without fear of being arrested and detained”, a Maldivian political analyst said. Interestingly, this situation emerged because Gayoom, who ruled for three decades through a controversial “yes-no” referendum, won 41 per cent of the vote in the 2008 presidential election; Nasheed, a longstanding dissident who represented the opposition Maldives Democratic Party (MDP), came in second, with 25 per cent. In the run-off, Nasheed was supported by the Adhaalath Party; and the new president gave the portfolio of the newly created Ministry of Islamic Affairs in his government to the Adhaalath Party.

5 As told to this researcher in an interview on 3 April 2011 in Malé
The Adhaalath Party’s inclusion in the ruling coalition gave the party a new legitimacy. It exercised clout far greater than that which its support base would merit or could achieve otherwise. In control of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, it was able to wield far more influence on religious affairs than it has in the past. Social and political activists in Maldives say that Atoll Radio, which is dedicated to religious preaching in the countryside, has offensive content of religious hatred. When asked why this kind of a radio is allowed to function freely, Hussain Rasheed Ahmed, the State Minister for Islamic Affairs and President of the Adhaalath Party replied to this researcher that as there are other channels dedicated to music and entertainment, this channel had been functioning for religious affairs. He also said that it is allowed under the freedom of expression and he did not want to curtail any expression on religion. But sources in government said to this researcher that with Adhaalath in the ruling coalition, the government is able to deal more easily with the more extreme Salafis on various religious issues. Besides, Adhaalath in government is less dangerous than outside. Keeping them out of the government would push them to the fringe and could encourage them to join hands with the Salafis, who are far more radical than others.

The new democratic setup has also helped to strengthen the place of religion in the public domain of politics, which was not the case earlier. The much-vaunted democracy might have come late to the Maldives after three decades of authoritarian rule, but its politicians have taken little time to master that great South Asian election trick of the competitive exploitation of religion. During the presidential elections in October 2008, in one of the press conferences, MDP Religious Scholars Council chief Adam Naseem said that religion in the Maldives was facing a “dangerous time”. President Gayoom, he claimed, had led the country into a “deep hole economically, socially and religion-wise by encouraging its citizens to talk about religion as if it is a joke” (Minivan News, 2008). For his part, Adhaalath Party cleric Abdul Majeed Abdul Bari said that

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6 As told to this researcher in an interview on 30 March 2011 in Malé
Gayoom’s policies had encouraged the rise of “harsh thoughts” code for Islamism. President Gayoom’s ruling Dhivehi Raiyyithunge Party (Maldivian People’s Party) for its part alleged that the MDP was fronting for Christian missionaries and accused the Adhaalath Party, which backed millionaire businessman Gasim Ibrahim as its candidate, of “selling religion” (Swami, October 2008).

In a sign of competitive religious chauvinism, ugly polemic marred the 2008 presidential election campaign. The Adhaalath Party moved the Supreme Court against President Gayoom’s re-election bid, claiming that he was “without doubt an infidel”. It claimed that Gayoom opposed concepts such as the death penalty and amputation of limbs for certain kinds of serious offences, that he had also repudiated certain theological concepts, that he was attempting to spread Christianity, an activity that is illegal in Maldives (Dhivehi news reports, 2009). Earlier, forty-four religious scholars, including the vice-president of the official Supreme Council on Islamic Affairs, set up by Gayoom two decades ago in an effort to use religion to undermine his political opponents, called on the President to “repent and fear Allah”. In their fatwa, they addressed several of the issues raised by Adhaalath in its Supreme Court litigation. Arguing that Gayoom had “used power and influence to use religion as a tool”, they advised Maldives voters to “stay away from his words and writings to save your religious opinions from danger” (Dhivehi Observer, 2009). In March 2008, twenty-two clerics came out in opposition against claims by Gayoom that music was halal (permitted by Islam), a proposition that was backed by state-endorsed liberal preacher Afrashim Ali. Gayoom asserted at his Dhivehi Rayyithunge Party (DRP) -meaning Maldivian Peoples Party, meeting in February that listening and singing songs was acceptable; Ali declared on state-run television that the Prophet Mohammad himself had sung songs. At a meeting organised by a right-wing NGO, Jamiyaathu Salaf, some 800 people showed up to hear clerics — some linked to the Supreme Council on Islamic Affairs, the Human Rights Commission — lashing out at the President’s approval of music. Adhaalath president Abdul Majeed Abdul Bari was present at the meeting, as was the MDP’s religious council member, Adam Naseem (ibid.).
Islamists, mostly drawn from the Salafist sect, known in India as the Jamaat Ahl-e-Hadith, made opposition to music a centrepiece of their 2008 general elections campaign. Ali Rameez, the Maldives’ most famous rock star, declared his conversion to neo-conservative Islam in 2005 by having his compact discs thrown into the sea off Malé, and invited his fans to follow neoconservative preacher Sheikh Ibrahim Fareed’s teachings. Later, his new songs praised the hard-line Islam and called for stringent following of the sharia law. Youngsters, particularly in the outer islands, were highly influenced by these developments and became radical in their approach towards their family and society.

President Gayoom’s religious credentials, in particular his degree in Sharia law, obtained from Al-Azhar University, did a great deal to propel his rise to power in 1978. Religion-based opposition to recognition of Israel and calls for prohibition were central to Gayoom’s campaign to dethrone then Prime Minister, later President, Ibrahim Nasir. He used his religious credentials to buttress his unelected government, putting in place a constitution which decreed that the office of the President would be “the supreme authority to propagate the tenets of Islam in the Maldives” (Minivan News, 2010). In recent years, Salafist intellectuals, who reject the conservative traditions of Al-Azhar, have proved skilful in hijacking the state-run religious institutions Gayoom set up to buttress his authority. For example, the Supreme Council on Islamic Affairs refused, in October 2007, to endorse the President’s calls to outlaw the use of the all-enveloping veil, known in the Maldives as the burqa. Gayoom’s anti-burqa campaign came after the Sultan Park bombing.

**STATUS OF RELIGION**

With these developments on the political front, it is pertinent to discuss here about the freedom of religion and the relevant laws in Maldives. To start with, even after the democratic transition, the law significantly restricts the freedom to profess a religion. The constitution designates Sunni Islam as the official state religion. The practice of any
Religion other than Islam is prohibited by law and only Muslims can be Maldivian citizens (Ministry of Justice, 2008). According to Chapter I, clause 9 (d) of the Maldivian constitution of 2008, a non-Muslim may not become a citizen of the Maldives. Non-Muslim foreign residents may practise their religion only in private and must not encourage citizens to participate. The President, members of the People's Majlis, and cabinet members must be Sunni Muslims and this is written clearly under chapter III in clause 73 (a)3 of the constitution which says that a person can be elected if he “is a Muslim and a follower of a Sunni school of Islam” (The President’s Office, 2008: 2 and 20).

The government prohibits the import of icons and religious statues, but the import of religious literature, such as Bibles for personal use, is generally permitted. Conversion of a Muslim to another faith is a violation of the government’s interpretation of Sharia. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs mandates Islamic instruction in schools, funds the salaries of religious instructors, and certifies imams, who are responsible for presenting government-approved sermons. No one may publicly discuss Islam unless invited to do so by the government, and imams cannot prepare sermons without government authorisation (Ministry of Islamic Affairs, 2010). The Minister of Islamic Affairs has the sole authority to grant preaching licences.

Lately, the Adhaalath Party is at the forefront of the campaign to bring stricter version of sharia punishments for crimes. Some local activists are of the view that “functionalisation” of Sharia may be an effort to enlist more members before the Presidential elections, which are scheduled for 2013. Attempts towards “shariatisation” of the state happen under such general socio-political conditions as are now seen in Maldives, where a young multi-party democracy is struggling to set in order its economic and social conditions, after a period of prolonged authoritarian rule marked by lack of religious freedom.
Linkage Between Lack of Social Welfare Policies and Terrorism

In the rapidly evolving debate over terrorism, there is substantial division over the importance of economic conditions in fuelling terrorism and the value of economic policies in fighting it. On one hand, much of the commentary and academic scholarship suggest that economic conditions such as poverty and income inequality greatly matter for terrorism by affecting levels of deprivation, feelings of injustice, and hence, political tension — a view supported by studies of individual attitudes, actions, and aggregate patterns of terrorism (Li and Schaub, 2004: 235). Some studies which suggest that poverty and inequality spur terrorism, imply but do not argue that social policies might mitigate both and thereby discourage terror. A few argue that weak welfare policies in some settings might strengthen religious groups fomenting fundamentalist extremism and, in turn, terrorism (Chen, 2003).

Social welfare policies — including social security, unemployment, and health and education spending — affect preferences and capacities of social actors in ways that, on balance, discourage terrorism: by reducing poverty, inequality, and socio-economic insecurity, they diminish incentives to commit or tolerate terrorism, and weaken extremist political and religious organisations and practices that provide economic and cognitive security where public safety nets are lacking (Burgoon, 2006: 177). Social policies include social security, unemployment, sickness, disability, health, and other policies explicitly furthering social rights. Although such policies make the “welfare state” a meaningful policy realm in industrialised countries, many developing countries lack such social policies but maintain a range of public spending programmes—from industry subsidies to military expenditures—that provide indirect social insurance (Rodrik 1998: 1009). Maldives, which recently migrated from the UN’s LDC to developing-country status, lacks funds to spur qualitative social spending and policies; and this has also exacerbated its vulnerability to social and political tensions.
Although most definitions of terrorism focus on politically motivated violence against non-combatants, there are as many definitions as definers, differing over who “non-combatants” are, what politically motivated means, and many other details. Within any given definition, domestic terrorism might differ from transnational terrorism (where the perpetrators and the victims have different nationalities). And more obviously, the roots of terrorism vary widely—nationalist struggle, ethnic strife, religious strife, separatist struggle, political-governance dispute, economic dispute, and anti-colonial revolt. Accepting this complexity in social policies and terrorism, Burgoon (2006: 178) argues that a broad range of social policies have offsetting implications for life chances and capacities of citizens that, on balance, reduce most forms of terrorism. In particular, various social welfare policies can be expected to reduce poverty, inequality, politico-religious extremism, and general economic insecurity, thereby diminishing the preference for terrorism. In Maldives, lack of funds has been a persistent problem for providing efficient social services and security, resulting in the disgruntlement of youth.

Investments in many welfare policies, especially spending on education, have positive effects on growth and poverty reduction (Benabou, 1997). Popular intuition suggests that poverty and low income spur political extremism and terrorism. Increased support for political violence, drug abuse, common crimes and for terrorist action can be found among the poor, unemployed and less skilled and less educated sections of Maldivian society. In Maldives, which lacks proper education facilities, many youths are going for madrassa education, particularly to Pakistan, and they are being radicalised there.

Saleh (2004) finds a significant negative relationship between per capita income of Palestinians and the incidence of suicide bombing between 1990 and 2000, net of a range of political conditions. Though the per capita income of Maldives shows a healthy picture of more than $6000 for 2011, this is mainly due to the tourism and resort activities and thus conceals the real poverty of the masses. Most Maldivian youth are unemployed or underemployed. This has created a fertile condition for them to involve in
anti-social activities. It is a vicious cycle, where drug addicts are brainwashed by a few religious radicals to evolve into extremists so that they may purify themselves of their sins. Li and Schaub (2004) suggest that countries with higher levels of per capita GDP tend to suffer fewer transnational terrorist incidents on their national soil. For both individual-level and aggregate analyses, in any event, the link between economic suffering and support for political violence is direct. Poverty and development may also affect terrorism indirectly, by influencing religious and political practices. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the roots of communal violence, hate crimes, and terrorism are most fundamentally social.

The Religious-Political Extremism Connection

There are views that social policies can be expected to lower terrorism by diminishing the participation and influence of fundamentalist religious-political organisations in society. At any given level of poverty, non-development or inequality, many religious communities provide shadow social services that make them imperfect substitutes for social policy in addressing poverty (Gill and Lundsgaarde 2004: 424). Examples of this phenomenon may be found across many situations and countries—from childcare and elderly assistance among Orthodox Jews in Israel, to maternity and sickness benefits among catechist groups in Ghana, to cash assistance and social services among Muslim groups in the Palestinian Territories, to poor-relief from Muslim and Hindu organisations in India, to cash payments and services among Christian churches in the United States (Townsend 1994: 545; Gruber 2003). Though these arguments hold true, there are instances where this kind of institutions help in propagating extremism, like what was witnessed during the massive earthquakes and floods in Pakistan. Religious organisations, some of which are actually fronts for some terrorist groups, were actively involved in relief operations; as a result, poor uneducated men joined the terrorist groups in gratitude. The LeT’s charitable front, IKK, carried out extensive relief operations in the southern atolls of Maldives after the tsunami. After this, many Maldivian youth started going to Pakistan for madrassa education (Swami, 2004). In Maldives, Ibrahim
Fauzee, a former Guantanamo Bay detainee, is running an NGO called Islamic Foundation. Some Maldivian social and political activists are concerned and sceptical about his activities and connections abroad with some radical groups.

Here, the state’s inability to provide proper facilities and timely relief for the suffering poor has been exploited by the religious/terrorist groups to their advantage. The welfare activities they conduct are imperfect substitutes for what the state should be doing. Only a more generous social policy and spending from the state could reduce citizens’ demand for this kind of substitute services, in turn diminishing reliance on religious and other organisations that recruit members partly on material bases to promote their vested interests.

A state’s social policy might also affect religious patterns via poverty. Poverty will tend to inspire larger numbers of people to seek out and deepen their religious belief, participation, and extremist religious-political activity in particular. Whether measured in individual or aggregate levels of membership, prayer, religious study, attendance or values, economic suffering can spur religious participation and organisation (Barro and McCleary 2003). If social policy can reduce levels of poverty, we can also expect that it should thereby reduce religious participation. Whether through direct or indirect effects, social policy’s reduction of (extremist) religious participation is important because religious fundamentalism tends to affect communal violence, including terrorism. Heightened participation in politico-religious groups with respect to out-groups can inspire extremist political views and action, even terrorist violence (Berman 2003: 943). This observation is significant in the case of Maldives where a minor group of people following the radical Salafi or Wahhabi sect of Islam is confronted by liberal Islamists and non-believers alike.

Obviously, the connection between religion and political violence needs much more research. But both individual and aggregate analyses of conflicts and religion suggest the link to hold across various religious and conflict settings – from links between Quran study and sympathy with terrorism in Indonesia (Chen, 2003) to

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frequency of mosque attendance and such sympathy in the Palestinian Territories (Ginges, 2004). So, it is expected of the government to commit itself for a higher social spending to improve economic security and social solidarity; to dampen demand for and participation in radical religious or political organisations; and to thereby diminish acts and tolerance of terrorism. Maldives has been certainly lacking on these fronts. This was proved right in Maldives by the events that happened during the later part of 2011 and earlier part of 2012. The disgruntled opposition members in the parliament, together with some religious radical elements increased their stake against the government on the pretext of safeguarding Islam and involved in mass demonstrations, openly calling for other members of the government to switch sides to the opposition, so that they can save Islam. They also brought together a lot of unemployed youths and anti-social elements to show their strength on the roads of Male’, the capital. They also co-opted the radical elements into different departments of the government, notably from the national defence force and the police, to stage a ‘coup’ of a different kind in the Maldivian history. The elected former President Nasheed was made to ‘resign’, thus making the nexus between self interested politics, radical Islam and impoverished youth convenient partners.

Social policies may also affect terrorism via connections that are more difficult to judge and less examined in existing scholarship. More generous social spending should increase citizens’ perceived (as opposed to objective) economic security—the belief that the social consequences of economic troughs as a whole will be partly insured against. Altogether, social policy can be seen to have offsetting implications for terrorism. Various social policies will tend to reduce poverty, increase wealth, and lower inequality, economic insecurity, and religious-political extremism—all thereby diminishing the taste for extremism and terrorist violence.

Apart from religious extremism, threats from the Somali pirates, who at one stage showed their allegiance to al-Qaeda, also loom large in the Maldives. The energetic international campaign against the pirates operating in the Gulf of Aden has induced them to spread out and venture into the Maldivian maritime domain. The eight-degree
channel between the Maldives and Minicoy witnesses traffic to the tune of forty large ships a day, and here piracy and terrorist attack is a major concern for the transiting vessels. In Maldives, the Somali pirates might even take the chance of attempting a coup with the help of the growing radicalised sections of Maldivian society. This was substantiated by the comment of the Foreign Minister of Maldives Mr. Ahmed Naseem in April 2011 (The Hindu) when he referred to the pirates attack on Seychelles, saying, “Somali pirates can be bold enough to come all the way to the Maldives. They sacked the Mahe port in Seychelles. They could do that in Maldives too”.

**COUP ATTEMPTS**

Maldives had fewer than 2000 lightly armed members of the National Security Service (NSS) as its defence force, before it was segregated into the MNDF and MPS, the military and police wing respectively (CIA Fact Files 2010) and violence was virtually unknown to the people. Since its independence, Maldives has faced no external threats in a conventional sense, but has experienced three coup attempts and some other unsuccessful coup attempts. The Chief of Staff of the NSS, Mahamed Zahir, has said that non-traditional security threats like mercenary invasion, terrorist activities and drug trafficking have always been a bigger problem for small states than traditional conventional military threats (Jaleel and Shaheed, 1997: 118).

The first serious coup was in May 1980, two years after Gayoom took over from President Amir Ibrahim Nasir. Nine former British Special Air Services commandos were stopped at Colombo’s airport after authorities were tipped off that they were on their way to topple Gayoom (Ellis 1998: 142). Nasir’s brother Ahmed Naseem, former deputy minister of fisheries, allegedly recruited them, but the former president vehemently denied the charges from Singapore, his home since he left office. In 1980, Nasir was also charged in absentia for misappropriation of government funds, but attempts to extradite him failed. Maldivian officials said they had no evidence that Nasir was involved in the 1980 coup attempt, but in April 1981, the authorities sentenced Ahmed Naseem to life imprisonment for plotting to overthrow Gayoom. In 1983 Gayoom encountered another
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unsuccessful coup attempt. The most serious challenge to Gayoom occurred on 3 November 1988. That year in September, Gayoom won 96.37 per cent of the vote in a referendum in which he was the only candidate. Gayoom was to be inaugurated for his third five-year term on 11 November (Los Angeles Times, 7 November 1988). Though the identity of the leader of the 1988 coup attempt was identified as a Maldivian businessman from Sri Lanka, the leaders and the brain behind the other coup attempts has not been ascertained beyond doubt. Suryanarayan (1993: 110) is of the view that Ibrahim Nasir was the ring leader of the coup attempts, though the former president vehemently denied it.

The archipelagic nature of Maldives makes monitoring activities in the outer islands challenging, and there has been a history of using them as a staging ground for illegal activities in other island states. Climate change and rising sea-levels are not the only security threat that these atoll island states are battling. In the 1988 coup attempt, a former Maldivian businessman, Abdullah Luthufi, who was operating a farm in Sri Lanka, led a seaborne mercenary force of about 150 from Sri Lanka and invaded Maldives, seizing key government installations. Interestingly, Luthufi had been accused of planning to assassinate then-President Ibrahim Nasir in 1976 and Gayoom freed him in 1979. Domestic dissatisfaction with the Gayoom regime, which did not allow opposition to its business and political interests, had disgruntled many business interests among the Maldivians are the reasons for the attack.

Luthufi paid the People’s Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) for participating in the coup attempt. PLOTE was offered at least $1 million – some estimates run as high as $10 million. There were also suggestions that the mercenaries may have been promised one of the small Maldivian islands as a base to launch their attack on Sri Lanka (Crossette, December 1988). Luthufi arranged for most of the men to take up employment in the capital several weeks before the attack and some disguised as visitors had already infiltrated Malé. The rest boarded boats bound for Malé on the day of the invasion. Reaching the island in the early dawn, they quickly joined up with their
comrades and stormed the Security building, the presidential palace and other government installations (Asiaweek, December 1988).

Luthufi himself led the attack. Armed with rocket launchers, mortars and automatic rifles, they quickly seized almost total control of the 370-acre coral atoll. Maldives then had a population of about 189,000. The mercenaries quickly gained control of the capital, including major government buildings, port and television and radio stations. They swiftly overran their targets, including the palace. But the Security headquarters was valiantly defended: several Maldivian soldiers died in the exchange of fire. Gayoom and several members of his Cabinet fled from house to house till he was put up in the NSS building. Luthufi himself led the palace assault and began issuing proclamations, ordering the surrender of Gayoom and the Maldivian forces. At one point, he declared that more than 2000 hostages would be killed if Gayoom did not give up (Asiaweek, December 1988: 37).

Power supply was cut at 7 a.m. The mercenaries, some wearing military uniforms and some in civilian clothes, massed at police headquarters. The invaders took over the hospital and were using ambulances for transport. When the locals heard the gunshots, they thought that it was a rehearsal exercise carried out by the NSS for their Republic Day celebrations (11 November). The attackers were moving back-to-back and the roads were deserted. Meanwhile, the attackers were busy getting the islanders from the “dhonis” as hostages: they were taken in a line in front of a building near the president’s jetty. Still, there were no NSS personnel on the streets. Meanwhile, the people were becoming curious why the shops had not opened (Minivan News, 2008).

The attackers warned the people not to come out. Initially, the BBC wrongly reported that 200 people were dead. The mercenaries went to the telegraph complex and fired many times but they could not take control of the building. The power cut was restored by evening after the mercenaries had taken into custody many social elite (ibid.). According to some residents, the attackers toured the city to reassure them that they did
not wish to harm civilians. That evening, hand grenades were blasted in front of the NSS headquarters, and many people were forced to sit along the waterfront.

India helped foil this coup attempt after it launched “Operation Cactus” on receiving a distress message from the President (Sahadevan, 1999). On 4 November 1988, Gayoom made a speech on Radio Maldives. He said that the government had received no prior warning of the attack. But in a speech he later gave to Parliament, he said that “a person called Abdul Majeed Khalid had given prior warning of the attack to Defence Minister Ilyas Ibrahim and the government had taken adequate steps based on that information and this is the reason why the terrorists failed.” Local residents recalled that military posts had been erected with sandbags at different places in Malé just a few days before 3 November (Dhivehi Observer, 2007). This casts doubt on the lack of effective preparedness on the part of the government machinery and the ability of the NSS to meet this kind of challenges from non-state actors and terrorists, even though they had information of imminent danger.

In retrospect, the attempted takeover was not all that unpredictable. Like many island states, the Maldives has little military muscle. “A standing army?”, Manikfu, Maldives Ambassador to the UN, responded quizzically when queried about the strength of his country’s defence forces. He said, “We don’t even have a sitting army” (Asiaweek, 1988). The NSS at that time was estimated to be only 2000 strong, armed mostly with old British-made rifles and submachine guns, with abysmal training and exposure on combat tactics.

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7 The Maldives was a protectorate of Britain until granted independence in 1965. Most of these weapons are the ones which were left over by the British military.
THE RECENT POLITICAL TURMOIL

The first democratically elected President of Maldives could not finish his full term of five years and he had to “resign” on 7 February 2012, which he later claimed was “under duress”. President Mohamed Nasheed undertook a series of reforms in both the political and economic spheres, but this was met with opposition from the entrenched interests, who formed a united front against him. Subsequently, he was accused of adopting the autocratic methods of his predecessor and bitter rival. In January 2012 Nasheed had ordered the military to arrest Criminal Court Chief Justice Abdulla Mohamed, accusing him of collaborating with Gayoom (Minivan News, 27 January 2012). The former regime’s networks of power and influence were increasingly being threatened by Nasheed’s campaign against corruption in the judiciary. His opponents savaged him with jihadi hate speeches to the effect that he was undermining Islam and was an agent of Christians and Jews. The entry of that brand of Islam into politics has unnerved practitioners of traditionally moderate Maldivian Islam and Western governments alike, and raised worries it could threaten the nation’s toddler democracy. In the outer islands, there are fears that hard-line militant Islam is taking root.

After Justice Mohamed’s arrest, Nasheed defied a Supreme Court release order, sparking more than three weeks of sometimes violent protests by opposition parties. The reason for his non-compliance with the Supreme Court order, Nasheed said, was because the judge, like the other 200-odd criminal court judges, was illegally sworn in for a life term and had blocked every attempt to bring multi-million-dollar corruption, rights abuse and criminal cases against Gayoom’s allies and relatives (Hull, 2012). The constitutional reforms that followed the first democratic elections failed to dismantle Gayoom’s control of the judiciary and the rampant corruption that has seeped into the system during three decades of Gayoom’s rule. There wasn't enough focus placed on these institutions when the democratic reforms were initiated; everyone was just focused on getting rid of Gayoom. The protests before the fateful day of February 2012, saw the convenient nexus
between the self interested politicians, religious extremists and some loyalists in the
government to the former regime of Gayoom.

The democratic waves that Nasheed created as an activist during the early part of
the last decade have seen a reverse wave against his democratic government with the
unholy alliance of politics, religious extremism and self-serving business interests. The
forces that are part of this reversal process have their own agenda in colluding with the
others to undermine the emerging free society and democratic reforms.

First, Gayoom wanted to safeguard his and his relatives’ interests in the
corruption charges against them by Nasheed’s government. There were also elements in
the government and defence force, still loyal to Gayoom, who were undermining reforms
to safeguard their own positions. This underscores the fact that dictatorships do not
always die when the dictator leaves office. Most of the ring leaders of the coup were
ministers in the new President’s government, in charge of important ministries including
external affairs, interior ministry and defence ministry. Close aides of Gayoom and his
family members are in important government positions. The new senior advisor to the
current President himself actively took part in overthrowing the former President
Nasheed.

Secondly, Islamic radical forces have been feeling that they are not able to
implement their brand of Islam fast enough, though there was a newly created Ministry of
Islamic Affairs to look into the religious affairs of the nation. They have been looking for
opportunities to increase their support base and to impose their views on society. Thirdly,
the Nasheed government introduced many economic reforms. One such major reform is
the introduction of public-private partnerships for major infrastructure projects. Some of
those who have their business interests in resorts and other business were also politicians.
They were closer to the Gayoom regime and formed their own political parties in the
wake of democratic reforms against Gayoom. But when they saw a threat to their
business interests and political ambitions, they wanted to get rid of the Nasheed
government, which is under obligations to international organisations like the IMF and World Bank to undertake financial and democratic reforms in a phased manner.

In both the 1988 coup attempt and the recent turmoil in the nation, the underlying reason is the business interests of some people. In the 1988 coup attempt it was the business interests of Luthufi and other businessmen who were disgruntled by the Gayoom regime. In the recent episode, it was the business interests of the older regime and their accomplices. The only major difference between the two events is that the former was the result of the authoritarian style of governance which served the interests of very few influential people, whereas the latest coup was against the interests of the people, spearheaded by a few businessmen politicians who were affected by the reforms.

It is by now clear, by observing the restrictions put on peaceful protests and gatherings, that democracy and freedom of expression are not safeguarded in the Maldives under the new government. Nasheed is at the forefront of any effort that is needed to protect these universal values. He was out on the streets of Maldives from the very next day of the coup. He has repeatedly said that he wants democracy restored by non-violent peaceful methods. But the current regime, backed by the unholy nexus, is not heeding to the democratic peaceful methods of protests and requests both from within the country and from the international community. This has created a condition of uncertainty in the political and democratic sphere of this atoll state. “My romantic ideas of how to deal with a dictator were wrong” (Minivan News, 13 March 2012), Nasheed said in an interview to a foreign media channel on how he failed to deal with Gayoom effectively. Looking into this history and his continued struggle to bring back genuine democracy in Maldives, there are more problems ahead on the political landscape of this tiny atoll island state.

**Conclusion**

Coup attempts in Maldives cannot be ruled out entirely. The influence of the terrorist outfits in the region is a potential threat for Maldives’ peace and security. In
November 2010, addressing the nation on the 22nd Victory Day of the failed coup attempt, Special Envoy to the President, Ibrahim Hussein Zaki, who was then Permanent Secretary at the Foreign Ministry in 1988, stressed that using the coup attempt for political gains was observed during the most critical time of the 2008 multi-party presidential election (Minivan News, 5 November 2010). In April 2011 violent demonstrations were held in Malé on the issue of rising prices of commodities, and Nasheed’s government was overthrown in February 2012, largely aided by the security forces. A so-called unity government was installed, which prominently includes the opposition party members in key posts. Throughout world history, it has been proved that income inequality fuels social discontent, political instability, and violence, including deaths, in domestic disturbances, assassinations, and coups. Maldives suffers from these problems. The problem of rising religious extremism is a serious concern for the government, which is facing severe economic problems too. The unholy nexus between different vested interests has created political and social turmoil in the country. It has to be seen what steps the government will take to control extremism through legislative measures and initiating social welfare policies, etc. with the cooperation of the international community. The next two chapters will look into these aspects in detail.