CHAPTER - VIII

Conclusion
The Maldives is among the most vulnerable and least defensible countries against the problems of climate change and associated sea-level rise. This is mainly due to its vulnerable physical structures. Rising sea levels associated with warmer climate could submerge or erode coastal properties and endanger the economy by adversely affecting the tourism industry. Maldives is also economically vulnerable with a highly limited internal market and an extremely sensitive and competitive external market. The recent political disorder has also affected its growth potential and the rising religious extremism is threatening the peaceful social fabric of society.

In this study, to evaluate the problems and to identify the vulnerability and the response towards the non-traditional security challenges, certain variables like the problems of land loss, beach erosion, coral depletion, coastal protection and population consolidation, impact of tourism on the environment, human resource development and institutional strengthening, economic dependency on concession and aid, religious extremism and internal political order, and the extent of international cooperation were taken into consideration and analysed.

To conceive a broad analytical framework of non-traditional security and its relevance to the atoll island states, the changing perception of security from a traditional military state-centric security towards a comprehensive non-traditional security model was analysed. The importance of environmental security as a part of non-traditional security has been highlighted. The linkage between environment and security was also clearly demonstrated along with the problem of global warming and sea-level rise with regard to the security of small island states. The importance of economic security and stable political conditions was also discussed. To have a deep understanding of the nature of threats facing Maldives, the physical features, population and its political structure were discussed. The sources of vulnerabilities in terms of environment, socio-economic conditions, religious extremism and political order were discussed along with the impact of tourism and the tsunami on its environment and economy.

The Maldives’ environmental vulnerability is mainly due to its delicate physical structures and the repercussions on the ecology owing to human activity and resultant
Conclusion

pollution. It is more of a chain reaction where the origins of the problems are mainly found at a distant place, like that of global warming where the main reason for this phenomenon is increase in carbon dioxide emitted mainly by the developed countries, thus affecting the glaciers and resulting in sea-level rise. Apart from this, Maldives is more prone to natural disasters like tsunami and tidal surges; and their impact is very serious both on ecology and livelihood. Very limited options and policy alternatives have greatly hampered Maldives in evolving a comprehensive security network of its own.

The Maldives’ economic vulnerability stems from the nature of its market system where it has very limited options in terms of exports and has to import everything from the external market at higher costs. Most of the food products are imported, which makes the people vulnerable to external shocks in terms of price fluctuations and availability of goods. The Maldives’ huge trade deficit with most of its leading trade partners is ever increasing on account of its increasing population and consumption patterns. The increasing debt burden is another major source of insecurity. The very limited options to diversify its products and markets apart from the two main sectors of tourism and fishing have stagnated the economy. In recent years, fisheries has not been doing well and there has been a decline in fish catch due to internal and external reasons. Though tourism continues to provide most of the country’s revenue, that too depends on favourable climatic conditions and secured environment.

Challenges to the political order and the rise of religious extremism are an immediate threat for Maldives security. The democratic process initiated in 2004 has not seen its logical conclusion, by becoming a functional democracy with institutional safeguards for the protection of independent organisations within the government and the rights and freedoms of individuals. This process has witnessed a setback by political unrest created by a combination of people having vested interests. The stable political order which Maldives witnessed from 2008 has been disturbed by some people who wielded powers during the three decades of authoritarian rule. Making use of the newfound freedom of expression and taking advantage of Maldives being a hundred per cent Muslim nation, radical elements have also started preaching hatred among different groups and are inciting violence in the name of religion. Lack of proper education and
employment opportunities has driven these elements abroad towards a radical school of Islam.

The kind of threats that the Maldives faces prove the first hypothesis that the perennial insecurity of atoll island states is rooted in their peculiar national geographic and economic framework and their achievable national goal is limited to the extent of managing security challenges than overcoming them. This has been substantiated by recurring problems of insecurity from non-traditional security aspects of all forms. To cite an example, even after undertaking major projects to safeguard important islands after the 2004 tsunami, Maldives was still affected by tidal surges in 2007. This gives the only option of adaptation and mitigation measures, rather than totally overcoming the security threats.

A range of factors, including wealth, technology, education, information, skills, infrastructure, access to resources and management capabilities decides adaptation capacity to environmental changes. Adaptation becomes successful and sustainable when linked to effective governance systems. Institutions at all levels of governance and their effectiveness as well as technology play a critical role in successful adaptation. Adaptation to climate change in Maldives is not only a sustainable development challenge but also a survival issue. Most of the current adaptation programmes focus on one or two sectors. There is a need for such programmes to be more comprehensive and they have to be mainstreamed in national development plans and strategies. In Maldives, where communities live with various risks, coupling risk reduction and development activities provides additional adaptation benefits. The “safe islands” programme is one such project in Maldives. This strategy forms a part of “no regrets” adaptation strategy (UN-OHRRLLS 2009: 35), while reducing present vulnerability to climatic hazards and helps to prepare for the potential future impacts of climate change. Maldives can significantly enhance its adaptation capacity through regional arrangements and pooling of resources. For example, it is more efficient to establish and manage early warning systems at regional rather than national levels, as has been proved by the setting up of tsunami early warning system.
While analysing the response of the Maldivian government in ensuring the country’s non-traditional security, the institutional structures and legal provisions were discussed. The national programmes, policies and projects were also analysed, where community participation was given importance. From the time that Maldives realised that it could not sit back and wait for others to take action in safeguarding its environment and economic interests, Maldives has continuously brought in new policies and programmes at the national level. It started with the Environment Protection and Preservation Act and progressively moved towards creating marine reserve areas, making environment impact assessment (EIA) mandatory for developmental projects, enacted the fisheries law to protect its marine stock, created an environment National Action Plan to focus on the preservation of ecology, etc. To reduce the impact of the tourism sector on the environment, specific rules and regulations have been imposed on the development of resort islands. This in turn also helped the tourism industry by maintaining its attractiveness without losing the country’s sheen as an idyllic holiday spot. The fisheries laws in particular have been useful for Maldives, in terms of prohibiting modern methods of fishing in favour of only the traditional line-and-pole method. This creates a huge market in the Western markets, particularly in UK, and also in Thailand for being an environmentally friendly method of fishing. All these policies enabled a sustainable form of tourism and fishing practices, which ultimately resonated in securing the decent livelihood of Maldivians.

Maldives, being aware of its limitations, has always used bilateral and multilateral formations to voice its concerns at the international level. AOSIS was formed to highlight the environmental and economic problems of small island states. Maldives has played an active role by hosting international conferences with the participation of vulnerable countries like the Small Island States Conference on sea-level rise and participating in the BPOA and other international conferences pertaining to environment and economic development. It has also utilised regional initiatives like SACEP, Asian tsunami early warning system, SAARC coastal zone management, etc. to ensure its security concerns. UN specialised organisations like UNDP, UNEP and other international institutions like WB, IMF, ADB and GEF have always been a source of strength and guidance, adding
value and focus to government projects. The assistance of major international donor community for Maldives like Japan, Australia and EU in the tsunami recovery and reconstruction programme went a long way in reviving the normal life of the affected people. The “safe islands” programme is a success story which highlights the commitment of the international donor community to the security of Maldivian lives. Even the introduction of multi-party democracy and administrative reforms has been possible with international support. The Commonwealth has always been an active partner in the interests of Maldives; this was proved even during the latest political disorder witnessed after the controversial transfer of power in February 2012. India as the biggest stakeholder in the region also took the initiative to mediate between the opposing groups. The new Maldivian government was made to backtrack on the members of the inquiry panel regarding the incidents leading to the transfer of power. New members were appointed on the insistence of India and Commonwealth observers. The Maldivian government needs international cooperation to curb the rising religious extremism. This is possible only with a close-knit network of intelligence gathering and exchange of information among different states. This has to be supplemented by providing high quality of education and vocational training to the locals to keep them out of the influence of radical elements, drug abuse and anti-social activities.

In ensuring the economic security of Maldives too, the international community plays a major role, by providing timely financial assistance and policy recommendations for prudent management of resources. The Maldivian government’s agreement with the IMF to reduce its fiscal deficit and to bring in tax reforms is a case in point, where the government’s autonomy in decision-making according to its own interests is compromised. The Indian role in the mediation process between the opposition parties in the aftermath of the alleged ‘coup’, further reiterates that Maldives is in need of external influence to sort out their domestic issues and that shows that they are vulnerable to external pressures. These things prove the second hypothesis, that since the challenges to Maldives are serious and the capacity of the state is limited, the international community’s crucial role in promoting comprehensive security has itself increased its vulnerabilities and eroded its autonomy in decision-making.
Conclusion

The dependent structure of the state of affairs in Maldives makes it more vulnerable to external forces. The global environmental problem and the economic slowdown affecting the Maldives is a huge challenge, which Maldives could not solve without external help. To avail of external help, Maldives has to follow the agenda set by influential countries and groups in international fora, sometimes contrary to its national policies. Even in domestic policymaking, apart from bilateral and multilateral partners, institutions like IMF and UN specialised agencies have also influenced Maldives to formulate specific policies from time to time. On the economic front India has been a regular contributor and it has been giving more incentives to Maldives in recent times. As a gesture of reciprocation and also in tacit understanding, Maldives has not ventured outside the region, particularly towards China, to avail external assistance for its economic and military needs. The huge amount of financial assistance given by India has limited Maldives’ option to form an engaging relationship with other big powers of the world.

Measures for Strengthening Non-traditional Security

Beach formations in the Maldives are highly vulnerable. Land loss and beach erosion is a very widespread and significant problem. Some islands are so seriously affected that not only the shoreline, but even houses, schools and other infrastructure is being lost, compelling the government to initiate urgent protection programmes. Erosion and land loss may be exacerbated by consequences of the projected rise in sea level. The government has already committed itself to reduce the number of inhabited islands by developing regional growth centres, which is apparently seen in its “safe islands” programme, to provide significant benefits including health and education facilities and employment opportunities to attract migration from smaller and less populated islands. Long-term climate change considerations are also factored into this policy measure.

Coral reefs perform crucial environmental functions in the formation, maintenance and protection of coral islands, while contributing significantly to the economic resource base of the Maldives. This vital ecosystem is highly sensitive to changing sea surface temperature and other climatic factors. Currently, the government
has designated 25 reefs as protected areas. The creation of a national park and protected areas system of the Maldives will go a long way towards establishing a long-term protection, management, and monitoring system for the Maldives as well as provide for the recovery of stressed systems across the archipelago. Intrusion of saltwater and reduction in the sustainable yield from the freshwater lens are impacts associated with climate change and sea-level rise. Some of the water resources, especially in low-lying atolls, may be degraded beyond recovery. Changes in the average annual and temporal patterns of rainfall have also led to localised water stress on some islands, requiring augmentation of desalination alternatives. Appropriate technologies to extract water sustainably from the groundwater lens and water-recycling methods in resort islands need to be examined to reduce the demand for freshwater.

Though possible adaptation strategies have been identified, Maldives lacks the capacity to adapt both financially and technically. Hence, for the Maldives to respond successfully and implement appropriate adaptation strategies, financial resources and technological capability, including human resource development in various fields, are urgent requirements. Human resources capacity building in all major sectors is identified as a critical component in successfully responding to the impacts of climate change. However, emphasis has been given to the most immediate requirements of the coastal sector since coastal erosion and land loss have been identified as potentially life-threatening to the inhabitants of the Maldives. The Maldives lacks technical capacity in all areas of coastal zone management. Therefore, training is required in specific fields, such as surveying and coastal engineering, to develop effective coastal zone management and to implement adaptation projects. To meet these needs Maldivians have been offered scholarships and training programmes abroad to be better equipped with enhanced capabilities for adaptation strategies and environmental protection.

As climate change is a global issue, coordination and cooperation of programmes at international and regional level is viewed as an integral part of institutional capacity building. To mitigate the worst effects of greenhouse gases (the main reason for global warming) at the national level, a National Implementation Strategy has been developed to accommodate the main policy elements into national planning. Through such policies, the
Maldives is already benefiting from arrangements such as the Global Environment Facility, SAARC convention on air pollution, etc. Maldives has ensured continued active participation in regional and international climate change-related activities by strengthening and portraying a collective voice for all small island states at international forums for their collective security.

The problem of sea-level rise has also been given high priority by the international community, which is apparent in the EC’s financial and technical support for the “safe islands” programme. Japan’s contribution towards building the sea wall around Malé has been internationally recognised. There has also been cooperation in protecting the water resources, biodiversity, corals, flora and fauna, and other rich marine resources of the country through training, research and technological assistance. The Maldives’ national policies and programmes are also integrated with the international projects undertaken by organisations like UNEP, UNDP, GEF and SACEP, etc. Community-level participation in the environmental security programmes and projects has been more effective, since it makes the people more aware of the causes and consequences of environmental degradation and climate change scenarios.

The international community needs to provide stronger financial and technical support to Maldives, both through special funds such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and other international frameworks, including the Barbados Programme of Action for SIDS. The founding of GCF within the framework of UNFCCC as a mechanism to transfer money from the developed to the developing world, in order to assist the latter in adaptation and mitigation practices to counter climate change is a step forward in addressing the concerns of small states. Its objective is to raise $100 billion a year by 2020. To kick-start environmental projects, a Fast Start Funding of the GCF was agreed, encompassing $30 billion for the period 2010-2012. Maldives hopes that funds would be provided for its national adaptation and mitigation efforts on a priority basis. This will also help it in moving closer towards its policy declaration of becoming a carbon-neutral country in 2020.
Whether through alternative floating architecture, alternative energy, better prediction of disasters or any number of other technological inputs, the future of Maldives on earth depends upon the cooperation of the international community to solve the problems caused by global warming and environmental consequences.

**Securing its Economic Interests**

A much larger part of the population is still economically insecure. As the tourism and fisheries industries are dependent on good seasons, the income levels of the people involved in these activities are irregular. Policymakers need to be concerned therefore not just about helping people to escape from poverty, but about preventing vulnerable population groups from falling into poverty again. This necessitates the government to take prudent measures to increase the range of income options for its people to generate income other than from fisheries and tourism. Government needs to find new sectors of growth and making them a viable offshore production/manufacturing option. Maldives had, for example, a few garment industries till a decade ago, before they were affected by the new rules and regulations imposed by WTO on textile products. Genuine efforts have to be taken in vocational training in various fields of expertise. Here again, the cooperation of the international community is needed on providing appropriate training programmes and facilities.

The Maldives has been promoted as a diving destination on the international market. Since coral reefs are highly vulnerable to changing climatic factors, the Maldives should try to reduce the dependency on a single sector through diversification, as well as presenting the islands as a premium destination by offering better quality of services including mid-range tourism. Product diversification is essential for the sustainability of the tourism industry. It could include cultural components and adventure activities, such as traditional sailing, as well as establishing convention centres to host international meetings, which has been accomplished by the Addu convention centre opened during the recent SAARC summit, and promoting ecotourism. Climate change can be used as a positive impact on tourism by focusing on ecotourism. Diving could be promoted as an opportunity for divers to participate in the long-term monitoring of changes on the health
of the reefs. In this way, climate change can be used to attract the sophisticated, educated divers of the world.

After introducing democratic reforms, Maldives engaged in prudent management of its finance and started implementing progressive taxation measures to raise its domestic revenue. With the help of the IMF, the government brought some fiscal consolidation programmes like cutting the salary of civil services and introducing general sales tax (GST) to tide over the debt. This also included opening up public-private partnerships in major infrastructure projects and providing other services. With all these improvements, government expenditures are expected to decline from 64 per cent of GDP in 2008 to 45 per cent by 2014, mainly reflecting civil service reforms. The government’s revenue measures—airport tax, ad valorem bed tax, business profits tax, and general sales tax—are expected to yield about 15 per cent of GDP once their full impact is felt. These new taxes are expected to partly offset steep falls in import duties, lease payments, and profits transfers, stemming, respectively, from the fall in public expenditure, moderation in future lease payments from resorts, and privatisation. But with the problem of political uncertainty and the reluctance of the new government to carry on with the austerity measures followed by Nasheed’s government, there are serious problems for Maldives in its economic security.

To ease its financial condition, Maldives could explore the possibilities of becoming a destination for Offshore Financial Centres (OFC). Diversification into OFC would complement and strengthen existing activities such as tourism and fishing. But due care has to be taken that it does not hurt Maldives’ major trade partners in the region like India and Sri Lanka by becoming a tax haven. Small island states like Maldives have to pursue their underlying comparative advantage for their economic growth particularly on the narrow patterns of sectoral activities like tourism, fisheries and OFCs. They cannot diversify their economic base too broadly as it puts many constraints on their

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1 An OFC is usually a small, low-tax jurisdiction specialising in providing corporate and commercial services to non-resident offshore companies, and for the investment of offshore funds.

2 Tax havens are countries which have low-tax or no-tax regimes to attract financial services and other economic activities, with high degree of secrecy and lack of strong rules and regulations for conducting business.
development path. This shows that their economic insecurity can only be managed and not overcome.

**Restoring Democracy and Curtailing Religious Extremism**

After decades of authoritarian rule and restrictions, Maldives has been pinning its hope on the democracy dividend for aid from international donors, through the democratic reforms it introduced in 2008. But that has now taken a beating because of the alleged coup and subsequent resignation of President Nasheed. When the new ideas of opening the country and its economy, particularly tourism, were put in place during the 1980s, they brought a substantial change in the way of people’s life and there was considerable economic development. Likewise, new ideas and policy measures were brought in by President Nasheed, which included public-private partnership in business and infrastructure projects, creating a free society with liberal ideas, undertaking austerity measures in governance to have a healthy financial system, fixing accountability free of corruption in high offices, etc. But these ideas were cut short due to the self-interest of a few businessmen and politicians along with the religious extremists who opposed the liberal policies of Nasheed. Thus a great opportunity for a new Maldives has been missed. This shows that Maldives is still vulnerable to internal political turbulence and has not matured enough in its domestic politics.

The Maldivian authorities approached India over fears that one of its island resorts could be taken over by terrorists, given its lack of military assets and surveillance capabilities. Maldives has also consistently expressed concerns over the crucial tasks of protecting its vast Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). India has been assisting Maldives to develop and enhance its maritime surveillance with aerial mobility capabilities and operational acumen. To bring down the problem of religious extremism, India in partnership with other countries should provide a large number of scholarships to Maldivians to curb their penchant for madrassa education.
An Institutional Approach for Better Cooperation Among Nations

Regime theory in international relations gives importance to institutional arrangements established under the terms of treaties and conventions at the international level and the work done under them. Here, the concept of regime has been used to describe the institutional arrangements established under the terms of treaties and conventions and the established practices that have evolved more informally in international society. As institutional responses to a collective situation like disaster management, global warming and the environmental crisis, global economic crisis, cross-border terrorism and religious extremism, regimes are supposed to regulate the behaviour of the participants and promote aid for the overall good of society. Policy coordination at a collective level can be facilitated by common recognition of the issues and agreements on the means to achieve the goals. This approach is best suited for meeting the enormous challenges faced by Maldives, which has very minimum resources and power for its own development and security.

The best example that illustrates the effectiveness of regime theory approach on global environmental security is the ozone depletion regime, where the international stakeholders acted in tandem for achieving the set goals and guidelines in protecting the ozone layer from depletion. This regime created the Montreal Protocol Fund for assisting and financing the developing countries for effective implementation of the policies and goals set under the Montreal Protocol of 1987 (Dauvergne 2005: 389). This approach proved to be more effective for this kind of large-scale environmental problems, which need compliance and cooperation at the global level. This approach could also be replicated in economic cooperation, curtailing religious extremism and restoring democracy in Maldives.

The regime theory framework holds good for explaining the emerging international institutional order to mitigate environmental dangers and economic volatility. This framework also is very indicative for an ideal setup of international cooperation to deal with impending environmental dangers, particularly global warming.
Conclusion

Subscribing to the regime theory approach would mean strengthening institutional capacities.

Conclusion

Non-traditional security challenges to Maldives could be mainly categorised under three aspects. The first are the short-term threats coming from lack of political order and increasing religious extremism. Appropriate measures should be taken immediately to solve the ongoing political impasse to ensure a functioning democracy and to curb religious extremism. The second order of threats relates to the mid-term threat of economic vulnerability. If Maldives achieves prudent financial management with successful diversification of its income base among different sectors, combined with sustained growth rate for a few years with the active help of the international community, it could reduce its vulnerability to external forces and make its economy stronger. Finally, the environmental problem forms a long-term security threat for Maldives. The sources of environmental security challenges for Maldives are perennial and recurring in nature. Proper planning and adaptation measures have to be taken on a sustained basis. For all these to become a reality, Maldives needs the support of the international community and its development partners. Finally, to borrow from John Donne, “no man is an island” and “no state is an island”. Maldives has minimal capacity to meet its existential challenges and it needs unequivocal cooperation of the international community to survive as a nation.