Preface
Security is not what it used to till some decades ago. Apart from state-centric military security, many factors like poverty, economic development, environmental degradation, political order and internal threats influence the need for a comprehensive non-traditional approach towards security. After the end of the cold war and with the absence of military threats to most of the third world states, there have emerged different kinds of human security threats due to globalisation and free market, combined with natural disasters and environmental degradation, religious extremism and terrorism, making them vulnerable and threatening the lives of millions of people around the world.

In the past, only a traditional security threat of military nature used to be a challenge for nation states and their sovereignty. But now, environmental degradation and global warming have created a scenario where nations’ sovereignty is being threatened in a non-traditional security perspective. Within a hundred years, sea-level rise due to global warming will inundate small atoll island states like Maldives, Vanuatu, Tuvalu and Tokelau, wiping them out completely from the global map. Small island states are also facing a huge task in their economic progress in the era of globalisation and the absence of strong specialised international bodies to represent them in the international fora has exposed them to external shocks and influences of many kinds. Commencing in the latter half of the previous century, a new problem has risen of religious extremism and unstable internal political order due to contestations between different groups of society for freedom, opportunity and development. In each of these aspects small atoll island states are particularly disadvantaged due to their inherent vulnerability in terms of physical structure, inadequate finance, lack of qualified personnel and technology, etc. This makes them hugely dependent on the international community and its institutional structures to safeguard their security interests.

Maldives is an atoll island state in the Indian Ocean consisting of 1192 islands, of which just 200 are inhabited. The ecology of the islands and reefs is extremely delicate and the survival of Maldives is very much dependent on its environment. Environmental insecurity is a far greater threat to the Maldives than any other threats. Maldives’ worst fear is that its territory will be submerged predictably within the next fifty to hundred years due to global warming and sea-level rise. The country’s geographic vulnerability of being a small island/atoll nation accentuates its problems in many ways. This, combined with limited healthcare facilities, absence of
domestic food production to meet all of its needs, technological limitations, lack of trained personnel in disaster mitigation, is a major threat to the country's human security. Maldives is severely vulnerable to environmental problems and natural disasters, as was been witnessed during the 2004 tsunami. Development of tourism economy has again led to environmental problems. Both the physical survival of Maldives as a nation and its economic security are inextricably intertwined with its environment.

The Maldivian economy mainly relies on tourism and fishing industries. The lack of resources and infrastructure forms an impediment to the country’s economic development. It had negative growth rate immediately after the 2004 tsunami. But in the subsequent years, it managed to recover from the economic slowdown as a result of international aid and developmental assistance. Maldives is heavily dependent on aid. It received US$27,900,000 in 2007 and $66,839,000 in 2008. Dependence on aid makes the economy debt-ridden. Maldives' external debt is about $420 million. Due to the recent global economic crisis, there has been a decline of aid and developmental assistance given by the international donor community. The tourism industry accounts for 28 per cent of GDP, generating more than 60 per cent of Maldives' foreign exchange receipts. About 90 per cent of government revenue comes from import duties and tourism-related taxes and this shows the narrow base of its revenue. Fisheries contribute over 15 per cent of the country's GDP and engage about 30 per cent of its workforce. The economic vulnerability of the country can be explained by the lack of agricultural production, high dependence on export and import of goods, and small scale of its economy. Maldives imports about 90 per cent of its food requirements. Illiteracy, unemployment and huge population add to the country’s economic vulnerabilities.

The political system was centralised until recently, which has been replaced with multi-party democracy in 2008. Maldives experienced three coup attempts by mercenaries and the most serious one in 1988 necessitated external intervention. The threat of mercenaries is still possible in the light of the ongoing war on terror in the South Asian region, as the disgruntled terror groups could use the uninhabited islands of Maldives as their safe havens. Maldives does not have a strong standing army to deal with such non-traditional security threats. Maldives is also witnessing the emergence of religious fundamentalist forces with linkages to terrorism in the region, as reported in September 2007, in the backdrop of bombings in the capital Malé. This
problem has been accentuated by the space offered by the new democratic setup in the country which offers freedom of speech and expression. These are sources of instability and insecurity for this atoll state.

Vulnerability is an integral part of Maldives, whether it is in environment, economy or political order. These problems cannot be totally overcome as they are intrinsic to Maldives’ geo-physical nature. Maldives can only try to adapt and manage these vulnerabilities with the help of the international community.

The problems for Maldives are vastly different from those of larger states and also its capacity to solve them. By virtue of the “smallness”, land area and resources, problems of socio-political, economic, environmental and security sectors get magnified manifold. Security threats for Maldives have always been characterised in the context of underdevelopment and backwardness till a decade ago. But the growing evidence of global warming and its implications on small island states has brought the issue of sovereignty of states like Maldives to the top of concerns. Apart from its intrinsic vulnerabilities, the intra-national problems, geopolitical and strategic realities of Maldives affect its decision-making and aggravate its insecurity. This has been amplified because of the ongoing complex and difficult process of national development after the introduction of multi-party democracy and administrative reforms in 2008. Though these problems are common for all nations, things get intensified in the case of small island states. For these small states, the options available for course correction are very limited.

Against this backdrop, the study will have the following main objectives:

1. To assess the sources and magnitude of non-traditional threats to Maldivian security.

2. To evaluate the capacity and constraints of the Maldivian government in ensuring the country’s security.

3. To analyse the Maldivian security policy and its inherent weaknesses and limitations in tackling national security challenges.

4. To evaluate the role and importance of external support for Maldivian security.
The stated objectives of the study will be aided by examining the following research problems/questions:

1. What are the peculiar geographical features of Maldives and how do they affect its security?
2. Will the country be able to manage and overcome the tremendous challenges posed to its environmental security?
3. Is insecurity a permanent feature of Maldivian life?
4. Does Maldives enjoy sufficient capability to deal with all its security problems?
5. Does the country’s dependence on external support generate different sources of insecurity?

This study proposes to test the following hypotheses:

1. Given the fact that perennial insecurity of atoll island states is rooted in their peculiar national geographic and economic framework, their achievable national goal is limited to the extent of managing security challenges rather than overcoming them.

2. 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.

This thesis has been divided into eight chapters. The first chapter develops a conceptual framework on security of small atoll island states. While examining the peculiar features of atoll island states, the chapter will define the non-traditional security challenges facing them from the perspectives of environmental security, socio-economic security, and challenges to internal security in terms of political order and religious extremism.

The second chapter will briefly look into the profile of Maldives highlighting its physical features, socio-economic conditions and the system of governance according to the Maldivian constitution, the place of religion in society and the role of the military in securing national security.
The third chapter will focus on the environmental insecurity of Maldives. It will analyse the country’s physical structure and its inherent vulnerabilities, the impact of global warming and sea-level rise on its security and survival as a nation. Apart from bringing out the environmental vulnerability, damages caused by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and its impact on the economy and the ill effects of tourism on the environment will also be discussed.

The fourth chapter will identify the peculiar economic and developmental problems as a source of Maldivian insecurity. Particularly, the lack of economic diversification, absence of industrial growth, dependence on economic aid, financial assistance and tourism industry will be analysed. It will also deal with the security implications of the recent global economic crisis and the reduction in trade, aid and developmental assistance for Maldives.

The fifth chapter will analyse the systemic factors for the insecurity of Maldives. Particularly, it will examine how centralisation of state power and the lack of liberal democracy have resulted in coup attempts and political upheaval. The new democratic process has also stumbled in the recent times. The unstable political order will also be discussed in this chapter. The rise of religious extremism is a matter of security concern, which this chapter will analyse against the backdrop of the 2007 Sultan Park bombing and detention of Maldivian jihadis.

The sixth chapter will analyse the institutional structure of Maldives, the legal provisions on safeguarding its environment, and the government’s policies and programmes in ensuring its security. This chapter will deal with some of the important national policies and programmes the government has undertaken to overcome its security problems. This is with regard to economic development, environmental protection, disaster management and mitigation efforts, etc.

The seventh chapter will analyse the role played by the international institutions and donor community in helping the Maldivian government in ensuring its non-traditional security needs. Particularly, this chapter will focus on technical and developmental assistance provided by the international community in safeguarding its environment, promoting the economy and ensuring democracy and political order. The role of the Maldivian government in association with small island states in highlighting its vulnerability in international fora will also be discussed.
Besides summarising the arguments, the concluding eighth chapter will test the hypotheses. It will assess the capacity of the Maldivian state in ensuring its non-traditional security on its own and also with the cooperation of the international community.

Though the title stipulates a study of a period from 1988 to 2008, this thesis invariably looks into the period beyond that. This is mainly because of the changes in national policy initiatives and the government’s orientation towards its economic management on a different trajectory after the coming into existence of multi-party democracy and new political order. So the latest developments, particularly in the economy, religious extremism and political stability will be dealt in detail.

The study is based on employing the historical, descriptive and analytical methods. For this purpose both primary as well as secondary sources are used. As far as secondary sources are concerned, the data were collected from the existing literature – books, research articles and news articles from different magazines, newspapers and internet sites. Seminar and study reports by eminent scholars and researchers were also consulted. Primary source materials were collected from the Maldivian government and international organisations’ publications. A field trip was undertaken to Malé for a period of fifteen days from 25 March 2011 to 10 April 2011 to collect data. Interaction with NGO activists from Bluepeace, Transparency Maldives, Maldives Democratic Network and interviews with experts, political leaders and cabinet ministers were insightful. One of the main drawbacks in obtaining primary data is that most of the data published by different ministries and specialised institutions of the government particularly that were prepared before a decade are available only in the local language Dhivehi. Here, the reports of international organisations and UN specialised agencies were very helpful in carrying out this study.