CHAPTER-VI

PROBLEMS OF GOVERNANCE
This chapter analyses problems of governance in Maldives. It highlights the geographical factor that has been a source of problems for the country. Also analysed are the problems of socio-economic development and the socio-economic implications of regional imbalances in Maldives. The challenges of settling human resource base in Maldives have also been foregrounded. The challenges of widening political representation in the higher offices of Maldives are of important concern. The country's security problems, both military and non-military; the causes for the coup attempts; and the Maldivian Government's strategies to overcome such challenges have been foregrounded. In this context, the 1988 coup attempt and India's military involvement to foil the coup attempt have also been brought into the fore.

The Geographical Factor

The geographical factor has been a source of problems for Maldives. As there are numerous uninhabited islands, there are problems in planning nation-wise provision infrastructures for development. There is a need for an alternative to allocate the resources meant for the development of infrastructural facilities, such as power generation or transport. The sparsely populated islands pose problems in the development of a network of infrastructures in the Maldives. A great deal of organizational innovation is thus required to ensure an equitable accessibility of welfare services on a decentralized pattern. It begins with an overview of the socio-political dimensions of its resources, both human and natural. The country faces challenges from the geographical point of view: challenges in terms of its security and sovereignty, which stem from internal and external problems. It is difficult to have a proper administrative set-up in all the 1,190 small coral islands in Maldives. Thus, its own stability is challenged from the geographical point of view. It is difficult to post military force in every uninhabited island, as there are a large number of islands.

Absence of military protection in the islands has thus become a deterrent in the proper governance of the Maldives.

The Problems of Socio-economic Development

The country faces problems in major fronts because of increasing population and uneven development within the country. Another reason is the huge socio-economic problems faced by the country. Apart from the inherent socio-economic problems, other reason that deters the growth of Maldivian economy is dependence of Maldives exports on international market forces. Fishery is a major contributing industry in Maldives, and it is dependent on export. Its tourist and shipping enterprises rely almost wholly on foreign demands. Domestic consumption is largely dependent on imports, which consequently means that prices in the countries of export affect the prices within Maldives to quite an extent. It was between 1974 and 1977, price rose by more than 35 per cent despite the controlled rate at which the State Trading Organization disbursed essential commodities. The increasing induction of the Maldives into the international market economic has also to cope with it.

The establishment of Maldives Monetary Authority in July 1981 was an attempt on the part of the government to usher in a central banking system, with a view to streamline and coordinate the transactions with the outside world. Simultaneously, the country tried blend economic growth with social justice. It was confronted with the task of maximal utilization of the hitherto underutilized resources. Meeting the target of economic growth actually meant lots of investments, which its poor economy can ill-afford. Consequently, the Maldives shed its age-long isolation and insularity and gradually got enmeshed into the vortex of international politico-economic systems to meet its developmental goals.

Like other Least Developed Countries, the Maldives is confronted with several economic constraints like: (a) a sharp increase in the cost of essentials as compared to the export earning; (b) insufficient export earnings, comparable

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1. As much as 48 percent of Fish is exported, International Monetary Fund, The Monetary and Banking System of Maldives, 1978, p.4.
inelasticity of export incomes and non-availability of export surplus; (c) low level of foreign exchange reserves or their inadequacy for requirements; (d) an adverse impact of higher transportation and transit costs; (e) a relatively low importance of foreign trade in the development process. However, there has been a shift in domestic, economic, and planning perspectives for development. Fishing boats are being modernized and mechanized; manpower is being trained to serve the deficient areas of planning; and implementation of new development programmes and exports called for the same. Development efforts are made on a wider scale so that gains may be disseminated to the majority. Social relations are thus undergoing transformation, which is yet to take a definite shape. The barter system is practically out of practice and the relations of production are taking on an employer-employee pattern. Existing institutional networks in various fields like education, fisheries, communication and transport, banking etc, are strengthened and, radical innovations are introduced.7

A gradually increase in the population has resulted in an uneven development within the country. There are socio-economic problems in Maldives even today, as compared to the situation in other South Asian countries where educational expansion has not only overshot employment, but has also led to the excess of the youths and labour forces within the economic framework. Maldives' socio-economic problems are because of external exposure, liberal educational policies, and the population boom. So far, it has been easy to accommodate these changes and reach a national consensus on public policies. However, as the process of social change permeates the backward atoll people, emergence of groups that perceive themselves as deprived and marginally is possible.8

Socio-economic problem is a major problem in the Maldives but diversifying its relations with the rest of the world can increase the rising domestic needs. These new developments in a small State and its struggle to maintain its identity in an increasingly interdependent world make an interesting study. The socio-economic problems are not only in terms of physical problems, but abstract conflates as well.

There is a conflict between tradition and modernity. Islam as the national religion has provided the Maldives with a national and cultural identity; with Divehi accepted as the official language. Divehi provides a common platform in Maldives; however, there is increasing social tension. The orthodox clergy is worried about the modernization and is trying to preserve the traditional Islamic way of life. It has to be seen how the traditional Islamic State will cope with the challenge of modernization. The government elite would need to discuss this issue, which is of concern to the security of the country, with much rationality.9

The focus is now on development and economic security in Maldives. The country was one of the poorest countries in the world according to the United Nations in 1971; but with the progress the country has made in the last decade, the country is now recognized as a middle-income level country in terms of human development.10 The adult literacy rate is more than 98 per cent. The World Bank has also described Maldives as a State with sufficient subsistence. Despite these achievements one must highlight the structural problems in its economy and development.11 The Maldives has a narrow economic base and it is greatly dependent on exploitation of marine resources for export and import.

The Maldives faces several physical and climatic limitations; hence, fisheries have traditionally supplemented agriculture. The low moisture-holding capacities of its coral-sand-derived soils limit the range of crops. But agriculture continues to be subsistence economic for Maldives total cultivable area is estimated to be around 6,9000 acres. Cash crops are the major products of agriculture in Maldives. Demand for agricultural products is increasing, and large quantities of vegetables, fruits, meat, and poultry products are imported, requiring valuable foreign exchange. The government is taking up steps to improve human resource base in the country. But, as

the process of modernization in Maldives is slow; the adverse consequences of the development process are gradually unfolding.\textsuperscript{12}

Challenges to the Widening of the Political Representation in Maldives Higher Offices

The Maldives faces challenges in widening the political representation in its higher Office. People do not get opportunity as political representatives in the higher Offices of Maldives. Few elites have been the privileged ones to dominate the higher Offices since independence. The governing elite comprises a closely-knit, extended family network. It is culturally united and is aware of the compulsions of development. Only a handful of families in the Maldives have been participating in the country's economy, politics, and social structure. The power passes from one member to another of the same or extended family as a legacy.

Since independence, the country has had two persons who occupied the higher Offices of the country. One of them is the present President Gayoom, who is in the higher office of the country since 1978. There is no place for common people and women in the presidential post. Women represent 50 per cent of the country, even 10 per cent representation in the important Offices of Maldives can not be found. Few elites of the country have also been dominating the Majlis since independence. The Majlis' unicameral legislature meets only to approve the Government policies. They approve their own policy when their interest is not affected.

Ex-President Ibrahim Nasir was in power only for one decade while the present President is holding the Office since 1978. He accommodates both dissent and criticism. Lack of modernization, however, has not provided for effective State functions. Without a proper democratic set-up, the whole democratic process has been weakened. If proper democratic political system could be launched, the leadership is also likely to function effectively. Such a system would widen the political

\textsuperscript{12} World Bank, Population project Department, The Demographic Brief for Maldives, World Book, Washington DC, April 1980, supplied by the National Planning Agency, Male.
representation in the higher Offices of the country. However, lack of a pure
democratic set-up has become a setback for the governance.

But education and modernization are influencing the people’s mind. Forces of
modernization permeating the society and more educated youth being exposed to
international milieu, imparting a set of values on democracy and development of the
Maldives is possible. Even large sections on the population have begun shedding
their traditional indifference of male-centered political development.

Nevertheless slow modernization and social tensions are still prevalent due to
a narrow political elite base. It directly deters the widening of the narrow political
base. It also disrupts the processes of consensus-building in the country. The
decision-making structures still remain narrow and only a close-knit kinship continues
to have easy access to the political Offices. Hence, Maldives still faces problems
because of lack of wide political representation in the higher Offices and a narrow
political elite base.14

Security problem is another challenge threatening the country. The security
problems of the country are found in both military and non-military fronts. And the
security concerns and military capability of Maldives are important subject matters
that need to be addressed. Environmental problem is one of the non-military
problems, and it is a serious problem threatening the Maldives Government. The
country’s territorial integrity and sovereignty can be threatened in the future if the
environmental problems are not curbed. Therefore, the challenges and causes of the
political disorder in Maldives are of serious concern.

Maldives being a small and weak island-State has no military capability to
defend itself from external threats. From historical perspectives, the threats are of two

13. Urmila Phadnis, “Maldives Challenges”. The Hindustan Times, (New Delhi), 28 February
1990.
SAARC Nations, pp.127-130
15. World Bank, Population project Department, The Demographic Brief for Maldives, World
patterns: pre-colonial period and colonial period. Perceptions of security threat changes over time with the geo-political transformation in the domestic, regional, and global environment. The historical factor relevant to security in one particular era need not remain constant for all times. To cope with changing security threats, Maldives needs to update its security arrangement. Every islands, be it uninhabited or inhabited, need more people to be recruited for security purpose. The government should make developments on defence affairs.

Maldives Security Problems (Military problems)

The country’s political, economic, and social structure, apart from ecological surroundings, have to be taken into consideration when security problems are analysed. The geographical distinction of the island-state also generates a different security consciousness, which is different from other States in the Asian subcontinent. Security concerns of small States of the Third World, especially island-states, arise mainly due to external factors. Their security threats do not originate from other sovereign countries but from non-state elements such as transnational mercenaries and terrorists. This is especially true of small island-states in the Indian Ocean in the post-Cold War era. Therefore, each island-state has to depend either on regional powers for its security or has to depend on the strength of the services by military and political means. Maldives once depended on India for its national security, but it is now making efforts to strengthen its national security on its own establishments.

Transnational mercenaries have threatened the country’s security thrice. Three coup attempts were made to oust President Gayoom from power. President Gayoom has been earning popularity by adopting policies of democratization and economic liberalization. If these things are the main concerns of the dissident groups in Maldives, President Gayoom will continue to make or adopt such policies much to the resentment of the dissidents. It can be observed from the statements of the defence and foreign policy decision makers that the Maldivians are at present paying

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more attention to the activities of mercenaries than the threats posed by bigger nation-states.\textsuperscript{18}

However, Mohamed Zahir, the Chief of Staff of the Maldives National Security Service, has pointed out that “irregular military threats have always been a problem for small state like Maldives, more than conventional threats.” Again, Ibrahim Hussain Zaki, former Security General of the South Asia Association for Regional cooperation (SAARC) stated that the “meaning of the word ‘security’ has broadened since the 1970s, so it is easier to discuss the problems of small State like Maldives, which is not fundamentally militaristic.”\textsuperscript{19} “The threats”, he said, “Maldives is facing at present include environmental degradation, location of Human Right, organized crime, drug trafficking and also AIDS.” All these threats culminate into a bigger security problem of the country\textsuperscript{20}.

The Maldives sought its security by various diplomatic means. It has kept out of cold war politics by adopting a policy of non-alignment. But times have changed and no country is ready to adopt the principles of non-alignment. Hence, various diplomatic initiatives of the Maldivian Government make it clear that its principal strategy works towards international support and commitment to its security. Maldives National Security cannot be changed to the security of the region because developments in its immediate and distant vicinity impinge on its interests. One of the security concerns of the island during the Cold War period was the threat of miniaturization of the Indian Ocean. It was a threat posed to the lateral and hinterland states.\textsuperscript{21}

Two reasons can be attributed to such a political stand. First, the nature and magnitude of the security problems of Maldives are such that they cannot be easily managed even by a large-scale support extended by a committed friendly power.\textsuperscript{22} Military threat of the 1988 can be well depended even with a minimum level of bilateral military assistance. There is an immediate need of a strong military force.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Maqsud ul Hasan Nuri, “Maldives in the 1990’s,” \textit{Spotlight on Regional Affairs}, March 1992, pp. 65-105
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
Maldives’ unit of security, called the National Security Service, has no sufficient security personnel. The main duties of the unit are to preserve the internal security and to patrol the country’s territorial waters from illegal fishermen and smugglers.

After the 1988 coup attempt, the military capability has not been fortified even after the 1988 coup attempt, but the government has increased the number of security personnel. Hardly 2,000 (NSS) personnel were there on duty. With such few numbers of security personnel, it is impossible to bring security to every uninhabited island in the country. Geographically, it is difficult to have military base on every island. Increasing the level of defence capabilities for self-defence against mercenary aggression is not sufficient. The country is unable to rise against the internal challenges to ensure security to its citizens. Maldives has failed to perform its most important duty as an island-State in South Asia.

Security problems are there because perceptions of defence and security are conditioned by its geographical characteristics, and threats conditioned by some other way. It may be internal social and political conditions besides proximity to large neighbours. So, for Maldives, the regional environment becomes equally important.

Maldives has a much more cohesive society and is not confronted with the problems of divisiveness. But it tends to accelerate the process of modernization. Social tensions are bound to rise and the Government must be sensitive to this issue. Neglecting the need for a strong military capability would involve an unnecessary risk for its security. The 1998 coup attempt in Maldives was an example of the outcome of limited security forces. Maldives has been dependent on India for military assistance to meet its internal security challenges. As the country is a part of the South Asian Subcontinent, sharing historical and cultural links with that of the SAARC countries for ensuring its security. SAARC can play an important role in Maldives security. It is recognized that a security order in South Asia requires an extensive economic cooperation among the countries of the region.

Environmental challenge is one of the serious security problems in the governance of the Maldives. Its territorial integrity and sovereignty can be threatened

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in the future. Being an island-State, the government should look into this issue and try to develop ways to protect Maldives from environmental challenges.

The Environment Problems of Maldives (Non-military)

It is known that environmental challenge is one of the non-military problems of the Maldivian Government. No other state in South Asia would be as seriously affected by environmental changes, as Maldives would be. In fact, its very survival would be threatened. All South Asian countries should join hands with Maldives in addressing the global environmental problems and the green house effects.

The greenhouse effect has some direct consequences on the security of small Maldives. A rise in the temperature of the sea-level due to global warming would affect a large number of islands; most of them are not above two metres of the sea level. It is likely that by 2100 the islands would disappear from the earth's surface. Maldives, along with some other Indian Ocean littoral states, is faced with the threatening prospect of environment degradation in the form of rise of the sea level due to increase of global temperature.24

President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, when addressing the United Nations General Assembly Session in New York on October 19, 1987, highlighted the problems of environmental challenges faced by the small states. The lifestyles of the Maldivian and their level of industrialization have little direct impact on these issues. It is the adverse impact of the industrialization in the world that has polluted the earth's surface.25

Pollution of the earth's surface has put Maldives in peril. The President said that the rich and developed nations have wealth and land to defend themselves from a rise in the sea-level.26 Maldives being a small State is more vulnerable to ecological degradation and it has to very soon prepare blue prints for sustainable development plan and policy.27 As Maldives lacks the economic, technical, and technological

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24. President Abdul Gayoom’s address to the UN General Assembly, New York, as cited in Maldives and her environmental position paper published by the Department of Information and Broadcasting, Male, Republic of Maldives, 1991.


26. Ibid.

capability to deal with the formidable prospects of a significant rise in the sea-level, he also said, "we did not contribute to the impending catastrophe to our nation and alone we cannot save ourselves." 28

**Challenges to the Political Order in Maldives**

Maldives has faced many problems of governance after independence and those were not external military threats but internal disturbances. Therefore, bringing about a stable political situation in Maldives has posed a challenge to the national leaders. The country has experienced three coup attempts in 1980, 1983, and 1988. What were the causes of the three coup attempts? Power struggle in Maldives is the possible answer to it. 29 Certain conditions are indicative of the power struggles in Maldives. First, only a handful of the families in the capital dominate the country's economy, politics, and social structure. Power passes on from one member of the family to the other as a legacy. Second, the decision-making structure is narrow because the President is the highest authority of the country; nobody can challenge him. The President enjoys absolute power. There is an undemocratic way of functioning of the Office of President. The rights are incorporated in 1998 Constitution is limited; and this is one of the reasons of the coup attempts. Limited opportunities and rights gave birth to dissidents.

Maldivian Government has been trying to function well; nevertheless there are certain constraints. Slow socio-economic development is one of the major constraints in bringing about good governance. 30 Amir Ibrahim Nasir is the first President of independent Maldives, when the country was not threatened under coup attempt. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom is the present President. With the three coup attempts, it is suggestive that the country is not heading towards a better democracy, with dissidents threatening the order of the State. People consider these two Presidents to be troublemakers. Gayoom's promises are populist strategies. He has failed to fulfill any of the major promises for the country. During his presidential elections he had promised a complete transformation of the political system of Maldives. It means

28 Maldives and her Environment, Department of Information and Broadcasting, Male, Republic of Maldives, 1991, p. 18
from centralization to decentralization of political power. He had even promised during his election campaign that a better democracy and political reforms are two things to be aimed. Another important promise was that the post of presidential elections would be held by direct election, for which the position of the Majlis (Parliament) can be strengthened.

Problems of governance in Maldives are increasing, as on the rise because the Government is not functioning for the welfare of the people. Consequently, the government has been facing many problems and challenges to the political order in the country. Maldives has been the target of mercenary attacks on several occasions. First time in 1980, second time in 1983, and third time in 1988. In 1988, a serious coup attempt was made that India’s military assistance had to be sought. The Indian military operation was undertaken with the code name “Operation Cactus”, which ended with the capture of the mercenaries on the high seas. Once the operation was over, Indian military withdrew from Maldives and normalcy was resorted. In the early hours of November 3, 1988, nearly 200-armed mercenaries from Sri Lanka set in surreptitiously to target Male. They went for three main targets: Headquarters of the National Security Service (NSS), the Radio Centre, Television and Telecommunication Centre, and the Presidential Palace.

The raiders headed for the presidential palace, which was soon vacated. President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom immediately contacted two embassies, in New York and Colombo and also sent distress calls to the US, Britain, Sri Lanka, India, Malaysia, and Singapore. During that time Rajiv Gandhi was the Prime Minister of India. The Prime Minister of India had consulted with his Congress Working Committee (CWC) and set up a special task force to deal the situation. Finally, the cabinet committee on political affairs met in the afternoon and took the decision to intervene in the Maldives coup attempt. But India’s role in the suppression of the coup attempt came under suspicion. While the big powers like the US, UK, and USSR


endorsed India's action upon the small states, it nevertheless reflected India's growing role as a regional policeman.\textsuperscript{33}

The raiders made a major mistake by not occupying the Hulule airport, which made it easier for the Indian paratroopers to land in Male. The Mercenaries fled their ship and had taken away 25 hostages. The Maldivian Transport Minister and a member of the Majlis were among the hostages. Two naval ships, INS GADAWARI and INS BETWA, were supplemented by Indian Air Force TU 142 from Goa. Two helicopters flew to Male and took four Maldivian officials to the GADAWARI to act as negotiators.\textsuperscript{34}

However, Operation Cactus was completed without a shot being fired. There was no large-scale killing by the raiding forces led by Abdullah Hutfi, the businessman who occupied the President's place for some time. It was not an easy task for the Indian Air Force to help restore normalcy. It reflected the poor capability of the Indian Intelligence Agencies working in Sri Lanka with the Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF), nearly 50,000 at the time, who failed to detect the infiltration of these Tamils.\textsuperscript{35} Hence, even the administration could be blamed for the problems when the time frame was limited. It was also difficult for the Indian Air Force to procure the maps of Maldives, which was mainly the domain of the Indian Navy.\textsuperscript{36} The administrative confusion was only resolved when the Indian High Commissioner in Male made a visit to India. However, India's success in the attempt to foil the coup was due to its military brilliance and strategic policies.

Another shortcoming of the raiders was they did not destroy the telecommunication link with the outside world. During that time, President of Gayoom was whisked away from his home close to the palace and taken to an unknown place. That was how the President was able to communicate with the international community. Another serious miscalculation made by the dissidents was

\textsuperscript{33} K.K. Katyal, "Indian Troops Foil Maldives," \textit{The Hindu} (Maldives), November 5, 1988.
\textsuperscript{35} Dilip Mukherjee, "India and Maldives: A New and Closer Relationship." \textit{Indian and Foreign Review}, Vol.12, No.8, 1\textsuperscript{st} February 1989, pp.16-24.
\textsuperscript{36} Urmila Phadnis, "Maldives Challenges", The Hindustan Times, (New Delhi), 28 February 1990.
they thought that the Indian Navy would need at least 18 hours time to intervene, so they ignored the role of the Air Force.

After the 1998 coup, Maldives was forced to review its defence requirements by modernizing its NSS. It also decided to create a defence intelligence service to monitor external and internal developments. The NSS now gets training from the US Special Forces and both countries have also conducted joint annual exercises for the last couple of years. Also the UN Charter has envisaged some mechanisms for ensuring the independence of small states from external threats. UN resolution 44/51 on protection and security of small States submitted by the Maldives and also adopted at the 44th session of the General Assembly.

According to the UN resolution of 44/51 on protection and security of small-states security measures are quite inadequate when it comes to the external threats. Maldives comes under that category. Also, the convention of General Assembly about the recruitment, use of finance and training of mercenaries provide a modality to challenge acts of terrorism and mercenaries. Hence, helps are coming from the international organizations, especially on political, economic, military, and humanitarian grounds. President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom also reposes tremendous faith in the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) convention on its effort to suppress terrorism.

Maldives has been a late entrant into the global committee of nations. It is not in keeping with the time of the developing world. The dominant concern among the developing countries has been the internal dimensions of security emanating from the nation-building and modernization processes. Thus, domestic socio-economic and political processes play an important role and so do the regional and global environment.

A north-south divide through the country characterizes the whole area of Maldives. During the negotiations between the British and the Maldivian authorities, some inhabited islands of the Addu and Huvadu atoll went under the leadership of

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Abdullah Afif Didi, who declared a separate state called the United Suvadive Republic in 1959. Though this secession was short-lived and died down after an agreement was reached between the Maldives and Britain in 1960, it underlined the possibility of a political division. The withdrawal of the British in 1976 adversely affected the Adduans in terms of jobs and many other facilities benefited by the atoll people.\textsuperscript{40}

A small island-State like Maldives finds it difficult to protect an area of 90,000 sq.km. and can be challenged by threats with military, economic, and ecological dimensions. The security problem of Maldives has a certain complexity due to its geopolitical location in South Asia. However, despite its small island-state status, it has always enjoyed an independent political identity. Ironically, the country is dependent, politically and diplomatically, for its regional security on the mechanisms of powerful countries.\textsuperscript{41}

**Conclusion**

Many factors are responsible for the problems of governance in the country. Political challenge is a more important factor than any other. This chapter has analyzed the problems of governance in Maldives. It has also explained the causes of the coup attempts in the Maldives and how the Maldivian government tried to overcome such challenges. The other important aspects, such as geographical and socio-economic; the various steps taken by the Maldivian leadership to put down the dissidents; the security problems and the military capability linked with the dissidents are the main factors responsible for the problems of governance in the Maldives. The geopolitical factor has also been a source of problem for Maldives. The incidence of a large number of islands remote from each other poses problems for its own economic development.

There should be a system of direct election of the Maldivian President, then strengthen the position of Parliament, and enhance the accountability of the Government. Political restructuring is necessary for good governance. More importantly, the quality of governance which expresses itself through attributes such

\textsuperscript{40} Jim Breetvld, “British Base on Gan Ready for Service,” *Times*, 9 December 1977.
as accountability, transparency, efficiency, empowerment, participation, equality, and justice are also important. And Maldives faces problems of governance because of lack of these things.

Deepak Tripathi, “India’s Maldives mission and after,” India Today, January 1989, pp.3-5.