

# TERRORISM AND EXTREMISM: A THREAT TO MALDIVES TOURISM INDUSTRY

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## ABSTRACT

Terrorism coupled with extremism is a global phenomenon, which the Maldives had avoided experiencing until 2007. Sustained and repeated terrorist campaigns can derail the country's economy, which mainly depends on tourism and related industries.

The review of literature and analysis of statistics establish that tourism industry is vulnerable and at the same time resilient. Incidents such as the Malé Sultan Park bomb blast and Himandhoo island mosque confrontation in the Maldives suggest that the society is losing its tolerant and moderate nature towards other cultures and ideas. These events imply a need to develop an achievable policy measure to counter the extremism in the country.

For a determined extremist group the Maldives tourism industry is an easy target. It is possible to attack or take hostage tourists in a resort or onboard a cruise vessel. Such an incidence can create fear among tourists and damage the idyllic image associated with the Maldives brand.

As terrorism and extremism have an international dimension, solutions can only be achieved through global cooperation. At local levels the ideology or thinking which leads to extremism should be countered and moderated.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Small states heavily depend on tourism as a main economic activity to generate income. Particularly for developing countries such as the Maldives tourism is an essential source of revenue generation and therefore, a major part of economic development. Tourism as an organised economic activity began in the Maldives in 1972<sup>1</sup>. Since then tourism flourished contributing a share of 27.2 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) directly in 2008<sup>2</sup> and a higher percentage of GDP indirectly as many tertiary and secondary activities had developed to support tourism industry. Inflow of tourist arrivals to the

<sup>1</sup> Niyaz, A (2002), *Tourism in the Maldives – a brief history tourism* (Ministry of Tourism and Maldives Tourism Promotion Board), page 7

<sup>2</sup> Tourism Year Book 2009 (Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture), page 29

Maldives is linked to external positive conditions such as a strong global economy and a prosperous life style in main markets such as Europe and East Asia. Tourists choose the Maldives as their choice of destination as the country is famous for its idyllic beauty accompanied with sea, sun, sand and service.

Tourism industry is highly sensitive to global events such as natural disasters, economic recession and terrorism etc.. The Maldives until 2007 had been regarded as a safe destination with a clean track record on ‘tourist terrorism’<sup>3</sup>. The Malé Sultan Park bomb blast of November 2007, tragically targeted at western tourists, changed this perception. Attacks such as this can massively damage Maldives tourism industry and could throttle the country’s economy.

## 2. TOURISM AND TERRORISM

The concept of tourism “may be defined as a service based industry comprised of several elements including transportation, accommodation, food and beverage, tours and merchandising”.<sup>4</sup> The economic significance of tourism to developing economies is indisputable. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) figures suggest that international tourism arrivals reached 900 million and generated approximately \$770 billion in foreign exchange earnings for recipient countries in 2007.<sup>5</sup> According to UNWTO, developing countries have led international tourism growth since 2000, with a market share of 40 percent in 2008. During the period between 2000 to 2007, international tourism arrival in developing countries increased by 54 percent to reach 360 million.

The United States Department of State defines terrorism as “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience”.<sup>6</sup> Terrorism against tourists often involves international citizens making it ‘international terrorism’ and may be defined as “terrorism involving citizens or the territory of more than one country”.<sup>7</sup>

The impact of terrorism on a country’s economy can lead to unemployment, homelessness, deflation, crime and other economic and social ills. Blake and Sinclair (2002), who have studied the impact of the September 2001 *al-Qaeda* strikes on the United States tourism industry, noted that “the contribution of tourism and travel to both

<sup>3</sup> Essner, J. ( 2003), *Terrorism’s Impact on Tourism: What the Industry May Learn from Egypt’s Struggle with al-Gama’a al-Islamiya*, IPS 688 – Security and Development (accessed on 30 December 2009, [http://sand.miis.edu/research/student\\_research/Essner\\_Tourist%20Terrorism.pdf](http://sand.miis.edu/research/student_research/Essner_Tourist%20Terrorism.pdf) )

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, page 3

<sup>5</sup> XII United Nations Conference on Trade and Development 20-25 April 2008 – Accra, Ghana accessed at [http://www.un.org/webcast/unctad/xii/pdf/unwto\\_rt2.pdf](http://www.un.org/webcast/unctad/xii/pdf/unwto_rt2.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Essner, J. ( 2003), *Terrorism’s Impact on Tourism: What the Industry May Learn from Egypt’s Struggle with al-Gama’a al-Islamiya*, IPS 688 – Security and Development, page 3 (accessed on 30 December 2009, [http://sand.miis.edu/research/student\\_research/Essner\\_Tourist%20Terrorism.pdf](http://sand.miis.edu/research/student_research/Essner_Tourist%20Terrorism.pdf) )

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

industrialised and developing countries is now so great that any downturns in the level of activity in the industry are a cause for concern. The repercussions extend beyond activities directly associated with tourism, notably airlines, hotels and catering, to sectors that supply intermediate or final goods that are purchased by firms and employees in the industry, so that all sectors of the economy are affected to a greater or lesser extent”<sup>8</sup>.

The Maldives is no exception as many other industries such as transport, construction, fishing and complementary industries are directly or indirectly connected to tourism. In addition to its direct benefits, such as foreign exchange earnings, tourism is also a source of foreign direct investment (FDI). According to the statistics, 48 percent of the tourist resorts are operated either by foreign companies or joint ventures in partnership with foreign companies in the Maldives.<sup>9</sup> Any negative impact to the tourism sector can have a ripple effect on the whole economy.

### **3. EFFECT OF TERRORISM ON TOURIST ARRIVALS AND MARKET SHARE**

The Malé Sultan Park bomb blast failed to produce results expected by the extremists. Tragic death of tourists could have had far more serious consequence on the psyche of tourists and world media. The direct impact of the Malé Sultan Park bomb blast on tourist arrival is difficult to judge. Based on a single incident, to draw a conclusion of its effects on tourist arrival may not be statistically accurate.

Some travel agents the author spoke to after the bomb blast highlighted cancellation of bookings by tourists, especially from the Japanese market. This may be a small segment of the market that reacted to the shock of the incident. During this decade the Maldives experienced a gradual increase in tourist arrival figures, except for the drastic decline in 2005. After the Boxing Day 2004 Asian tsunami, there was a 35 percent decline in tourist arrival numbers, in the following year.

Since then the number of tourists visiting the Maldives has gradually increased; 601,923 in 2006, 675,889 in 2007 and 683,012 in 2008.<sup>10</sup> The statistical comparison of tourist arrival figures to the Maldives after and before the 2007 terrorist bomb blast is inconclusive.

However, it is possible to draw some paradigm from neighbouring Sri Lanka, whose economy had suffered from a long war with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE or Tamil Tigers), the separatist group, which was defeated in May 2009. The conflict had taken a toll on Sri Lanka’s exports sector and tourism industry in particular.

<sup>8</sup> Blake, A and Thea Sinclair, M, 2002 Tourism crisis management Responding to September 11 [http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/ttri/pdf/2002\\_7.PDF](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/ttri/pdf/2002_7.PDF)

<sup>9</sup> Tourism Year Book 2009 (Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture), page 3

<sup>10</sup> Tourism Year Book 2009 (Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture), page 8

When tourism was introduced to the Maldives, most of the tourists who visited the country came via Sri Lanka.<sup>11</sup> Sri Lanka used to have a flourishing tourism industry until the conflict between government forces and Tamil separatists escalated. Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka have been fighting for a separate homeland for minority Tamils since 1983. As a tourist destination Sri Lanka compared to the Maldives has a more diverse product to offer for holidaymakers. The country with its rich tradition, culture, wild life and tropical climate has all the ingredients to be one of the top tourist destinations in South Asia.

Tamil fighters on repeated occasions have targeted the country's main airport, the gateway for tourists to come into the country. They also have targeted other civilian targets using suicide bombers indiscriminately killing civilians. Terrorism is synonymous with Tamil Tigers. American State department have put the organisation in its terrorist organisation list and remained on it even today.

Athukorala, an Economic Strategist delivered a speech in October 2008 at Management Club of Sri Lanka in which he pointed out that in the previous 25 years Sri Lanka had lost over 6000 billion Sri Lankan Rupees on the tourism sector due to the fear and violence that the Tamil separatists had created.<sup>12</sup> The fear component or terrorism's role is evident when tourist arrival figures to Sri Lanka are compared. Sri Lanka attracted around 300,000 tourists in the 1980's and even in 2009 the country is struggling to attract more visitors. Economists such as Athukorala believe that the decline in tourist arrival and lost tourism revenue is linked to terrorism and fear factor created by Tamil separatists in Sri Lanka.

Kenya which had a thriving tourism industry suffered from sustained terrorist attacks. The bombing of the United States embassy in Nairobi in 1998 and of a beach hotel in Mombasa in 2002, as well as an unsuccessful missile attack against an airplane used by Israeli tourists, had forced many governments around the world to issue travel warnings on Kenya. Some analysts estimated that the cost of decline in tourism revenue was costing Kenya at least one million dollars per day.<sup>13</sup>

The studies carried out on countries that enjoy a significant tourism industry but are subject to a high frequency of terrorist attacks show that there is a correlation with tourist arrival and terrorist incidents. An analysis carried out by Drakos and Kutan (2003) to test the regional effects of terrorism on market shares in the tourism sector supports this view. Their analysis used data for three Mediterranean countries, Greece, Israel and Turkey for the period from January 1991 to December 2000. The results show a significant own and spillover effects of terrorism on market shares. The researchers also documented

<sup>11</sup> Niyaz, A (2002) *"Tourism in the Maldives – a brief history tourism"* (Ministry of Tourism and Maldives Tourism Promotion Board, page 64

<sup>12</sup> Does Terrorism actually Affect tourist arrivals?, Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka), October 9, 2008 , (accessed on 20 October 2008 <http://www.hotelsmag.com/articleXML/LN865775393.html>)

<sup>13</sup> Essner, J. ( 2003), *Terrorism's Impact on Tourism: What the Industry May Learn from Egypt's Struggle with al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*, IPS 688 – Security and Development, page 3

evidence that the location (urban versus rural) and the intensity of terrorist incidents played a vital role in the decision making process of tourists when choosing destinations.

Evaluation of the effect of the 2000 to 2003 wave of terrorist attacks in Israel revealed an interesting difference between the reaction of local and international tourists. Whereas both groups showed high initial sensitivity to the attacks, many of the activities of local residents quickly rebounded. For example, a comparison of the number of nights spent in hotels a year after the beginning of the attacks showed an 80 percent decrease for inbound tourists and a 20 percent increase for domestic tourists.<sup>14</sup>

An initial analysis by Essner (2003) of the effect of terrorism on the Egyptian economy produces a mixed set of findings but still supported the theory that a sustainable continuous terrorism activity can harm tourism industry.

The shooting and bombing attacks across Mumbai in 2008, by *Lashkar-e-Taiba* also backs the theory that terrorism can have a transitory effect on tourist arrivals. The global economic downturn, coupled with the Mumbai terror attacks, considerably impacted the foreign tourist arrivals in India. The booming tourism industry experienced a growth of only 5.56 percent against a target of 14.56 percent in 2008.<sup>15</sup> For an effected economy to recover to a pre-incident level analysts estimate a period of about six to 12 months would be needed.

#### **4. RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM IN THE MALDIVES**

Religious extremism is a global phenomenon that the Maldives has so far managed to escape to experience in its bloodiest form. History suggests that the country practised Buddhism until the rulers in 1153 embraced Islam as the state religion.<sup>16</sup> Until recent times violent crimes against individuals are a rare occurrence. Moroccan traveller and scholar Ibn Battuta reported that Maldivians became unconscious when he handed a verdict to amputate an arm of a convicted thief while he was the chief judge of the Maldives.<sup>17</sup> According to the accounts of Ibn Battuta, Maldivians were timid and lived in a peaceful society where murder or violence virtually did not exist. Unlike countries in the South Asian region, Maldives is rarely exposed to violent crimes. Crimes committed in the name of Islam against believers of other faith hardly exist in the Maldives.

<sup>14</sup> Yechiam E, Barron G and Erev I (2005), *The Role of Personal Experience in Contributing to Different Patterns of Response to Rare Terrorist Attacks*, Journal of Conflict Resolution, Vol. 49 No. 3, June 2005, page 437.

<sup>15</sup> Meltdown, Mumbai attacks hit foreign tourist arrivals , 24 February 2009, <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/meltdown-mumbai-attacks-hit-foreign-tourist-arrivals/86145-26.html>

<sup>16</sup> *Dhivehi Thaareekhah Aualikameh*, (1990), *Dhivehi Bahaa Thaareekhah* Khidhumaiykuraa Gaumee Marukaz, Second Print, 1990, page 132.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, page 147.

Maldives culture analyst Romero-Frias (2002) tends to suggest that the Maldivian society was deliberately radicalised by local scholars educated in Arab countries.<sup>18</sup> Romero-Frias wrote “the intense indoctrination of the 1980s and 90s, when Islamization was imposed on the islands at a much higher gear than at any time in the nation’s history, has made Maldivians feel uncozy in their own country”. According to him the scholars graduated from Egypt and Saudi Arabia pontificated on Islam and harvested an idealised intolerant version of religion. He also suggested that “Maldivian people opposing arabization are in a very vulnerable position, because they are easily, and conveniently, singled out as opponents of Islam”. During the 1970’s the government of President Ibrahim Nasir experienced religious intolerance from his successor Maumoon Abdul Gayoom. Then Gayoom was a teacher and he challenged the authorities in his preaching stating that the government was un-Islamic. It was reported that Gayoom’s view on various religious matters forced President Nasir to convict and banish him to an island to serve his sentence. With the turn of tide Gayoom succeeded over Nasir and he ruled the Maldives for 30 years. Some writers suggest that this was the period that the Maldivian society was radicalised and a different version of religion took hold in the society. Chandrasekharan (2007) in his paper highlighted that “many critics are quick to blame President Gayoom for past mistakes like the introduction of Arabic in schools in the late 70s and 80s, revision of text books, creation of Arabic medium schools, or letting in all dubious characters in the name of preachers and letting the youth to get disillusioned and turn to extremism and violence”<sup>19</sup>. The teachings of some of the preachers educated in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia influenced minds of many people making the Maldivian society to lose its tolerance that was culturally passed on to the people for generations.

The growing extremism in the Maldives was evident from the episode of Himandhoo on 6 October 2007. A group of extremists established a separate mosque for worshipping, rejecting the communal island mosque built by the government. Following the Sultan Park bomb explosion the Maldives Police visited the island to question alleged suspects.

From Himandhoo island, about 70 masked extremists armed with swords, bricks, iron rods, catapults and wooden planks confronted the Police. During the confrontation about 34 security personals were injured and reinforcements from the Maldives National Defence Force were brought in the island to control the situation. About 100 security personnel searched every house of Himandhoo island, which had a population of about 600 and arrested about 50 extremists.<sup>20</sup>

Nearby island Ukulhas in North Ari atoll was also found to be an island which harboured extremists. Many of the islanders were youths who had access to extremist books and CDs to guide them in the extremist ideology and the religious congregations were also

<sup>18</sup> Xavier Romero-Frias (2002), *The Maldivian Islanders: A study of the Popular Culture of an Ancient Ocean Kingdom*, Nova Ethnographia Indica, page 288

<sup>19</sup> Chandrasekharan, S (2007), Maldives: Sultan Park Explosion- Dealing with Religious Extremism, South Asia Analysis Group, Paper no. 2476, <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers25%5Cpaper2476.html>

<sup>20</sup> 'BBC News, 8 October 2007, Militants' arrested in Maldives, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/7034507.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/7034507.stm)

being used for a similar purpose. Even today many self-proclaimed scholars visit regularly to these islands to preach on different matters. Most of their sermons focus on the past, warn of hell, detail the punishment from God and create fear among population. The preachers' sermons contain little substance and give no room for intellectual debate while disengaging listeners. Rationale questioning and alternative viewpoints do not exist on religious matters among the island communities.

Recently acquired freedom of expression helped to make transparent, the intolerant ideology that had been suppressed in the Maldives society. In November 2009 a bill was proposed by independent MP Ibrahim Muttalib on outlawing places of worship for non-Muslims, which was sent to a committee for further review with unanimous consent of all MPs who participated in the vote.<sup>21</sup> Fares-Maathoda MP Muttalib also submitted a bill to ban the sale of alcohol on inhabited islands, airports and uninhabited islands excluding tourist resorts.<sup>22</sup> In December 2009, in an act of vandalism a rock was thrown at Holiday Inn's head office building on Male', who recently applied for a permit to sell alcohol.<sup>23</sup> An American family, allegedly spreading Christianity, was deported from the Maldives on 13 December 2009 by the authorities on the island of Kinbidhoo in Thaa atoll, Maldives.<sup>24</sup> During November 2009 a music concert, part of Muslim festival of *Eid* celebration, was halted by a religious association in Thaa atoll Dhiyamigilli.<sup>25</sup> In the same month the 'Islamic Foundation', a local religious organisation called on the Maldives government to deport the editor of Minivan News website, Maryam Omidi, for publishing a reader-submitted letter which talked about legalising homosexuality in the Maldives.<sup>26</sup> The Constitution of the Maldives also categorically states that every Maldivian must be a Muslim.<sup>27</sup>

The developments within the political sphere and in the civil society suggest that in the recent past the Maldivian society has become more intolerant towards alternative views, cultures and ways of life.

<sup>21</sup> Miadhu, 19 November 2009, Bill prohibiting establishment of non-Muslim worship places sent to committee, <http://www.miadhu.com.mv/2009/11/local-news/bill-prohibiting-establishment-of-non-muslim-worship-places-sent-to-committee/>

<sup>22</sup> Minivannews.com, 25 November 2009, Bill on banning sale of alcohol "unconstitutional", <http://minivannews.com/politics/2009/11/25/bill-on-banning-sale-of-alcohol-unconstitutional/>

<sup>23</sup> Minivannews.com, 23 December 2009, Rock thrown into Holiday Inn head office, <http://minivannews.com/news-in-brief/2009/12/23/rock-thrown-into-holiday-inn-head-office/>

<sup>24</sup> Haveeru, 15 December 2009, Foreign National Accused of Missionary Work in Kinbidhoo is Deported, (<http://www.haveeru.com.mv/?page=details&id=90980>)

<sup>25</sup> Minivannews.com 30 November 2009, Religious association stops music show, <http://minivannews.com/news-in-brief/2009/11/30/religious-association-stops-music-show/>

<sup>26</sup> Haveeru, 17 November 2009, Islamic Foundation calls for Minivan News website editor to be deported, [http://www.haveeru.com.mv/english/details/28502/Islamic\\_Foundation\\_calls\\_for\\_Minivan\\_News\\_website\\_editor\\_to\\_be\\_deported](http://www.haveeru.com.mv/english/details/28502/Islamic_Foundation_calls_for_Minivan_News_website_editor_to_be_deported)

<sup>27</sup> The Constitution of the Republic of Maldives 2008: Article 9, Section D *states that a non-Muslim may not become a citizen of the Maldives.*

## 5. MALÉ SULTAN PARK BOMB EXPLOSION

The tranquillity of the Maldives was ripped apart on 29 September 2007 when the first bomb blast specifically targeted at tourists took place. The homemade bomb exploded in the capital, Malé, at 13:30 hrs local time, at the heart of the popular tourist attraction, the Sultan Park in Malé. The park, which houses the National Museum in the remains of the former Royal Palace, is located behind the Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) headquarters.

The bomb caused panic and injured 12 tourists. The injured tourists included two Japanese and eight Chinese as well as two Britons. The British couple, Christian Donelan, a security consultant from Rotherham, south Yorkshire, and Jennifer Green, both 32, suffered the brunt of the explosion and were severely burnt.<sup>28</sup>

In the explosion no Maldivians were caught up, which suggested that this was the first “tourist terrorism” deliberately targeting tourists in the country.

Following the investigation by the Maldives Police three men were tried and sentenced to 15 years in jail for carrying out the bombing. Mohamed Sobah, 19, of V. Landhooge Aage, Moosa Inaz, 21, of Laamu Atoll Kalhaidhoo/Finihiyaage and Ahmed Naseer, 20, of Gaafu Atoll Kanduhulhudhoo / Saadhuna Manzil, were found guilty under the Maldives Terrorism Act 1990<sup>29</sup> of “causing bodily harm with the intention of creating fear or terror”, after they confessed to planting and detonating the bomb in the Sultan Park.<sup>30</sup> According to Maldives Police these three people committed the major role in the crime.<sup>31</sup>

The key people confessed to their crime requesting the court to judge the case as soon as possible by issuing a justified verdict. As he passed the sentence at Malé Criminal Court, Judge Abdullah Arif said, “because of the nature of the crime I cannot show leniency”.

The Maldives police revealed that, out of the 16 terror suspects charged in connection with the Malé Sultan Park bombing, 10 suspects were in hiding in Pakistan.<sup>32</sup> The police believe that the 10 men who masterminded the attack left for Pakistan in the days preceding the explosion. Interpol warrants were issued for the arrest of the bomb suspects.

<sup>28</sup> Independent, 30 September 2007, “Two British tourists injured in bomb attack on Maldives”, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/two-british-tourists-injured-in-bomb-attack-on-maldives-404007.html>

<sup>29</sup> Maldives Terrorism Act 1990 clause (a), (d), (e) and (g) of article 2.

<sup>30</sup> Reuters, 14 December 2007, “Maldives bomb plotters jailed for 15 years”, <http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSCOL3985>

<sup>31</sup> “Three people involved in Sultan Park bombing sentenced to 15 years” 13 December 2007, Maldives Police Services, <http://www.police.gov.mv/?n=1816&lang=en>

<sup>32</sup> “3 terrorists of Sultan Park bombing sentenced” 14 December 2007, Miadhu Daily, <http://www.miadhu.com.mv/news.php?id=4606>



## **6. A POSSIBLE SCENARIO – TARGETING A TOURIST RESORT OR A CRUISE BOAT**

Most of the tourist resorts in the country are developed on self-contained islands. In 2008 there were 94 exclusive tourist resorts with a total bed capacity of 19,860 in the country.<sup>33</sup> The access to resort islands is mostly by sea. The tourists who holiday in these islands spend their holiday virtually separated from the general population of the Maldives. In a typical resort island, the staff comprise of Maldivians and migrant workers who are based in the island during their employment. Recent estimates put the number of migrant workers at around 80,000, which is equivalent to 26 percent of the Maldives population.<sup>34</sup> In a typical tourist resort each group often represents about 50 percent of the workers. There are growing animosity between locals and migrant workers, where some locals feel they are being treated unfairly.

A disgruntled and marginalised workforce could be an ideal source to recruit extremists to commit acts of terrorism. If an extremist cell penetrates the resort workforce they can easily take hostage the island and could cause carnage. Maldives resorts lack sophisticated security mechanisms. Even if a resort had such a security apparatus, a determined terrorist is almost unstoppable, as they often circumvent security. This is evident from a recent incidence where a Nigerian man boarded a Detroit-bound flight allegedly with explosives on Christmas Day 2009.<sup>35</sup>

Cruise boats, which accommodate tourists, can be another vulnerable tourist facility in the Maldives. In 2009 there were around 144 registered tourist vessels with a total bed capacity of 2135.<sup>36</sup> For a determined terrorist this is an easy target to take hostage as the boats cruise with around four to eight crews without any onboard security. Cruise routes often include islands through which the tourists come to contact with locals. No on-board security or intelligence resource may be able to halt a determined terrorist from committing a destructive act. Therefore, measures to prevent and minimise such acts should be put in place within the national security infrastructure.

## **7. MEASURES TO TACKLE THE GROWING EXTREMISM IN THE MALDIVES**

<sup>33</sup> Tourism Year Book 2009, Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, page 1

<sup>34</sup> Internationally recognised core labour standards in the Maldives, Report for the WTO General Council review of the trade policies of Maldives, (Geneva, 26 and 28 October, 2009), page 6

<sup>35</sup> Financial Times, 30 December 2009, Pressure rises on CIA after bomb plot, (accessed 30 December 2009, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/c89eea5c-f58a-11de-90ab-00144feab49a.html>)

<sup>36</sup> Tourism Year Book, (2009), Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, page 44

In 2006, President Gayoom established a committee to seek out measures that could address and counter extremist thinking.<sup>37</sup> Gayoom's Attorney General, Hassan Saeed and the justice minister Mohammed Jameel Ahmed were made advisers. Saeed who was the main contributor of the report later accused Gayoom's government for failing to address the issues raised and ignoring the recommendations made to tackle extremism in the Maldives.<sup>38</sup>

Their report recommended “an in-depth study of the extent of extremism in society, changing the way the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs operated, strengthening the laws and regulations tackling extremism, making people aware of the benefits of adopting a moderate way of life, employing the media to inform people on the importance of adopting a moderate path in Islam, changes in the academic curriculums, setting up of a council that can give *fatwas* on certain issues and encourage moderate scholars to visit the rural islands to raise awareness and inculcate in students a love for the moderate path of Islam.”<sup>39</sup>

The current government of Mohamed Nasheed elected in November 2008, have so far publicly done very little to address his predecessor Gayoom's failings to address extremism. After assuming office, Nasheed's government dissolved Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs and created a separate ministry to address religious issues; the Ministry of Islamic Affairs is run by the leaders of the religious conservative “Aadalath Party”.

The Maldives lacks a comprehensive legal framework to address terrorism. Matters that are related to terrorism are tried under an inadequate piece of legislation enacted in 1990<sup>40</sup> following a series of arson attacks on shops and vehicles.<sup>41</sup> This piece of legislation enacted by Gayoom's administration was often used to suppress and punish prisoners of conscience. The current president was charged using terrorism laws under Article 6 (b) with reference to 2 (g) in 2005.<sup>42</sup>

Several non-governmental organisations (NGO) including Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists' panel on counter-terrorism and human rights, in the past have criticized the country's terrorism laws and accused former president Gayoom's regime of using the regulations to imprison its political opponents. This legislation is in need of urgent review and a more comprehensive thorough piece of legislation is required to address the current threat of terrorism.

<sup>37</sup> Chandrasekharan, S. (2007) , MALDIVES: Sultan Park Explosion- Dealing with Religious Extremism, Paper no. 2476, 25-Nov-2007 (accessed on 30 December 2009)

<sup>38</sup> Ibid

<sup>39</sup> Ibid

<sup>40</sup> Law on the Prevention of Terrorism in the Maldives 1990 (Law No: 10/90)

<sup>41</sup> Amnesty International (2001), Maldives: Arrests of possible prisoners of conscience, Amnesty International May 1991 AI Index: ASA 29/01/91, page 2

<sup>42</sup> Chandrasekharan, S. (2005), MALDIVES: Gayoom Uses Anti Terrorist laws to suppress opposition. Paper no. 1519, 25 August 2005, <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers16%5Cpaper1519.html>)

Awareness and education are two important tools which can counter the extremist ideology. As suggested in Saeed's findings people should be made aware of the benefits of moderate and tolerant ways of life. Mainstream moderate media channels have to be empowered to tackle and question the thinking and ideology advocated by extremists. A culture must be created where open genuine debates and questioning foster. The political parties in the Maldives should avoid using religion as a political tool.

Root cause for the incidents such as the Malé Sultan Park bomb blast must be understood in the context of extremism. In order to address the issue extremists' ideology and why a group of youth carried out such an act should be analysed. It is widely believed that most terrorists attack a particular target to achieve a political goal or get media publicity for a particular cause. The Malé Sultan Park bombing trial revealed none of this or simply the authorities have yet to come up with any reason for the bombers' act. In most cases the terrorists choose tourist as easy targets to attack. In the Maldives tourist holiday in isolated resorts and come to contact with population only when tourists visit a local island or the capital Malé. The fact that extremists manage to target a group of tourist on a sightseeing trip in Malé suggests that, ample planning and precision had gone into the September 2007 attack. Targeting international tourists can generate a great deal of attention, causing tourists to avoid travel to that part of the world and the Maldives is no exception.<sup>43</sup>

With growing intolerance in the Maldivian society, the terrorism problem will be a complex issue and a huge challenge for the authorities to address. In November 2009 President Nasheed affirmed the seriousness of extremism in the Maldives and confirmed the arrest of 14 Maldivians in Waziristan in Pakistan, for being on the Taliban's side. In an interview with the Financial Times he raised his concerns; "the rise of militant Islam in the Maldives and extols the island state's liberal Sunni Islamic traditions".<sup>44</sup> He also mentioned that around 100 Maldivians are fighting along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, and warned the people against religious extremism during November 2009 radio address. Such warnings are likely to fall on deaf ears unless the government implements a workable policy to tackle the extremist ideology that encourages and condones terrorism.

## 8. CONCLUSION

Terrorist attacks like September 2001 by *al-Qaida* and November 2008 Mumbai hostage shooting by *Lashkar-e-Taiba* have shown that tourism industries in respective countries were hard hit. A smaller country like the Maldives, with a less diversified economy, is more likely to have trouble absorbing the financial impact of a repeated or a large-scale terrorist attack.

<sup>43</sup> Rama, B. (2009), Changing dynamics of terrorism and its impact on tourism, Kristu Jayanti College, Bangalore, page 2, ([http://www.mmbgims.com/national-seminar/docs/9\\_B\\_Ramya.pdf](http://www.mmbgims.com/national-seminar/docs/9_B_Ramya.pdf))

<sup>44</sup> Jacon, R (FT.com) Afternoon tea with the FT: Mohamed Nasheed, 27 November 2009, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/35f6ff72-dae2-11de-933d-00144feabdc0.html>

The Maldives bomb experience, such as the Malé Sultan Park bombing, has the potential to bring the economy to a halt destroying the tourism industry. The spread of extremism can easily destabilise the country. Progress of tourism industry is quite closely related with political stability in a destination.

Terrorism and tourism have global dimensions and the best way to deal with a global terrorist threat is global co-operation. However, it is fundamental that the problem is addressed at local levels by tackling the ideology or belief that leads a group or an individual to commit acts of terrorism. In the case of Maldives building a more moderate and tolerant society that is open to alternative ideas and views will help to tackle the growing extremism. For the Maldives it is vital to look after the tourism industry, which is generating much needed revenue and foreign currency.

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