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[Home](#) > Maldives and the Islamic State:

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Since September this year, former President Nasheed has been repeatedly pointing out that “Radical Islam” is getting very strong in Maldives. He made another significant observation recently that the strength of radical Islamists is increasing in the military and the Police. This should be of concern not only to Maldives, but also two of its neighbouring countries- India and Sri Lanka.

Nasheed had also estimated that of the 200 Maldivians who have joined the war in Syria, many are ex military men and that at least four Maldivians had died in fighting. It is now officially announced that a fifth Maldivian had also died in the war so far.

The figures could be higher as no one is sure as to how many Maldivians have actually left for the war front. While the Security establishment in Maldives admits that only seven persons are currently fighting in foreign civil wars, the James Town Foundation in its Terrorism Monitor Volume 12 of November 21, 2014 has said that about 100 Maldivians are believed to have joined the Syrian conflict and that most of them have actually joined up with Al Qaeda’s official affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra.

Nasheed blamed an influx of Saudi funds for the conservative turn of the Maldivian society as also the failure of the government in not taking any measures against the sympathy shown to the ISIS within Maldives.

In an interview to UK’s Independent Newspaper in October, Nasheed alleged that the Radical Islam is getting “very, very strong” and had again pointed its significant strength in the military and the Police.

On September 5 a protest march of a few hundred took place in Male with the participants carrying the ISIS flags and calling for the

implementation of Islamic Shariah in the Maldives. The placards they carried said

* We want the laws of the Quran, not the green book. (Green book refers to the present constitution that has a green cover).

* Islam will eradicate secularism.

*No democracy- We want just Islam

* Shariah will dominate the world.

Just a few days before the rally, the foreign Minister Dunya condemned the ISIS for committing crimes against innocent civilians. Earlier the Minister for Islamic Affairs had also condemned the ISIS and declared that the ISIS will not be allowed to operate in the Maldives.

Yet the demonstrations took place.

It was surprising that President Yameen had also not publicly commented on the presence of Maldivians in the Syrian War. More surprising that as recently as in September he said that his government is unaware of Maldivians fighting abroad. His Police as of September 16 was only willing to admit that about 24 Maldivians in Maldives are associated with foreign terrorist groups!

It was only when a query was raised by former Police Commissioner of Jumhooree party Abdulla Riyaz in the Majlis that the Home Minister Umar Naseer was forced to make a statement on the war in Syria and the participation of Maldivians. He was only willing to admit that “more than seven Maldivians are currently fighting in foreign civil wars.”

In addition, the Home Minister in his response made the following points.

* The Police have been monitoring persons with extremist religious views. Persons attempting to leave abroad with the intention of joining civil wars have been stopped with court orders. He had suggested that the “evidentiary standard should be lowered for terrorism cases. (*We need to remind him that Maldives has so far been misusing the terrorism laws. For example those who had alleged to have indulged in violence in Adu in the after math of the alleged coup in toppling Nasheed have been charged under terrorism laws!*)

* Some Maldivians have been brought back to the country with the help of foreign agencies. Police is also working with the Islamic Ministry to provide religious counselling. (*This does not include those already participating in the fighting where the Minister has indicated his helplessness in getting them back!)*)

* A strategic action Plan is being implemented to combat religious extremism and this involved prevention of radical views in public schools. (*No one knows the actual details of the action plan. But what is important to see is that the Saudi funds that flow generously are not misused for spreading radical Islam.*)

* In an effort to prevent recruitment in the country his government has banned independent prayer congregations across the country.

* He claimed that the number of Maldivians in foreign wars would be proportionately much lower than that of large European nations. (*This is no solace as Maldives is a hundred percent Sunni country with a total population of 3,41, 256 according to last census! While there is no independent confirmation of the number, even a figure of over 100 is large enough for a small country like Maldives. Only last month it was known that a jihadist group called Bilad al Sham (BASM) is running a media forum of Maldivians in Syria to publicise the activities and heroics of Maldivian Jihadists in Syria!*)

It is time that the government of Maldives takes the statements of former President Nasheed seriously. In a gathering of his party members recently on 25 November, he made an alarming statement that the government of his country “is on the edge of being toppled and that foreign terrorist organisations and domestic institutions are carrying out this task swiftly and together.”

While such an eventuality is not imminent, the government could take the following steps.

* Firstly, the Government will have to realise that they have a problem of radical Islam in the island. The IS is an idea and an inspiration for the radicals. If this is not understood or pushed under the carpet, no amount of legislation or action will ever help.

* The use of Saudi funds for spreading radical Islam needs to be regulated.

* The terrorism laws should be used only for terrorist acts and not for law and order situations. Otherwise the courts are also not likely to take the real terrorist acts seriously.

* Of late, the activities of criminal gangs have increased and nexus if any between the gangs and the security forces should be probed and prevented. Incidents of use of drugs by some members of security forces has also come to light.

* Serious crime cases like the kidnapping of the well known Minivan Journalist Ahmed Rilwan some 4 months ago should be investigated. Rilwan is yet to be traced and it does not speak well of the law and order machinery in the island.

* Visits of radical preachers need to be regulated. Although rules exist, there appears to be a reluctance to enforce the laws.

* Above all the government's security agencies could tie up with agencies of neighbouring countries who are also seized with the same problem.

Tags:

Maldives. Radical Islam [1]

IS [2]

Category:

Papers [3]

Countries:

MiddleEast [4]

Maldives [5]

Topics:

Terrorism [6]

Islamic Affairs [7]

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[4] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/middle-east>

[5] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/maldives>

[6] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/terrorism>

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