

Opposition plots regime change in Maldives

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6 September 2016

The BBC reported last month that moves are underway by opposition leaders in the Maldives, including Mohammed Nasheed, former president and leader of Maldives Democratic Party (MDP), to oust President Abdulla Yameen.

The apparent plot is being prepared amid an intensified campaign in the Western media to highlight the Yameen government's anti-democratic methods. The US and its allies are hostile to Yameen, not because of his record of human rights abuses, but due to his ties to China.

Citing unnamed "credible sources," the BBC reported on August 25 that Yameen's opponents were "looking to move against him within weeks." Few details were provided. A government spokesman denounced the ouster move but added that it was "a formal attempt to 'legally' overthrow the government" via a ballot.

The BBC simultaneously ran another article written by two correspondents who visited as ordinary tourists, secretly covering protests against Yameen and interviewing opposition members and media personnel critical of his rule.

The BBC report coincided with the news that Nasheed, who lives in the UK under political asylum, visited Sri Lanka on August 23. The *Mihaaru* website reported that Nasheed flew to Sri Lanka for "an important sit-down over the present crisis in the Maldives."

Nasheed was accompanied by former vice president and the head of the United Opposition of Maldives (UOM), Mohamen Jameel Ahmed. The UOM was formed in June in London on the basis of a common agenda of ousting Yameen.

Sharp political infighting, involving competing capitalist cliques in the Indian Ocean archipelago, has continued for months. The Maldives, strategically located astride major sea lanes, has become a focal point for rivalry between the US and China as

Washington has implemented its "pivot to Asia" and military build-up throughout the region.

While trying to maintain close diplomatic relations with the US and India, the Yameen government is heavily dependent on Chinese investment and concessionary loans. Washington and New Delhi are actively seeking to undermine Beijing and boost their own influence in the Maldives. Yameen is increasingly isolated after the resignation of key ministers.

As part of its crackdown on the opposition, the Yameen government instigated charges against Nasheed under draconian anti-terrorism laws for ordering, as president, the detention of Criminal Court Justice Abdulla Mohamed in 2012. Nasheed was jailed for 13 years in March last year. Under pressure from the US, UK and EU, he was allowed to travel to Britain, ostensibly for medical treatment. Nasheed is outspoken about his support for the US and India, and opposition to China.

The *New Indian Express* last week reported MDP international spokesman, Hamid Abdul Ghafoor, as saying that "India, the US and the EU are backing opposition moves to oust Yameen's dictatorial government by legal means." Ghafoor was in Colombo but claimed he did not know of Nasheed's presence.

During his weekly press briefing, Sri Lankan Health Minister Rajitha Senaratne did not confirm the presence of Nasheed and other opposition leaders in Colombo but did not deny it either. He referred to Nasheed's political activities in Sri Lanka during the previous government of President Mahinda Rajapakse and added that "he must be doing the same thing even now."

Rajapakse, who was regarded as too close to China, was ousted in January last year in a US-backed regime-change operation in the Sri Lankan presidential election. Since Maithripala Sirisena was installed as president, the Sri Lanka government has played an increasingly active role on Washington's behalf. It

mediated Nasheed's release and his travel last year to the UK.

Yameen clearly feels under siege. The country's courts last week issued arrest warrants for Nasheed, Jameel and MDP senior official Akram Kamledeen, who are also in exile in the UK. Police raided Nasheed's house in the capital of Male.

The government recently rammed a strict defamation law through the parliament that allows for jail terms and steep fines for journalists. The defence ministry has barred soldiers from meeting politicians and foreign diplomats, political party leaders and political activists without prior permission from senior officials.

The crisis surrounding Yameen has deepened in recent months, with rifts in the ruling Maldives Progressive Party (MPP). Gayoom, Yameen's half-brother and MPP president, recently opposed land laws that allow foreign freehold ownership, following criticism in the Indian media that the legislation will pave the way for China to set up military bases.

Gayoom's daughter, Dunya Maumoon, resigned as foreign minister in July. Several MPs are also supporting Gayoom.

The international media is ramping up the pressure on Yameen. The *New York Times* published a lengthy interview with Nasheed, who accused Yameen of corruption. Yameen, who was head of the State Trading Organisation, sold nearly \$US300 million worth of oil to Myanmar's military dictatorship in the early 2000s, despite sanctions by the US and the EU. "Nearly half of the money disappeared," Nasheed said, implying Yameen siphoned off the money.

Al Jazeera has announced that its investigative unit is getting ready to release a documentary named "Stealing Paradise" which it claims to reveal "how a president [Yameen] hijacked a nation and millions of dollars were stolen."

The *Australian* has published reports about the "danger" that Maldivians are joining ISIS to fight the Syrian regime. Its report headlined, "Could a terror threat sink paradise?" noted: "The country famed for white sands and laid-back locals is teetering on the edge of a coup with unrest and the threat of Islamic State terrorism set to see paradise turn ugly."

Some of the Indian media have written articles urging Prime Minister Narendra Modi to back the opposition in the Maldives to move against Yameen. After

referring to lost opportunities to reassert Indian influence on the island nation, a *Times of India* columnist declared: "India must assert its credentials by helping democrats to come to power."

The opposition parties in the Maldives do not represent a democratic alternative to the Yameen regime and pose great dangers for workers and youth. Like every other country in the region, the Maldives is being drawn into the machinations of US imperialism and its allies as it intensifies its military build-up in Asia and war drive against China.



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