

Chapter 6: Maldives

Ibrahim Waheed

Population (1993): 236,000

Population Growth Rate (1960-93): 2.7% per annum

Land Area: 298 square kilometres

Sea Area: 100,000 square kilometres

GNP per Capita (1993): US\$820

Year of Independence: 1965

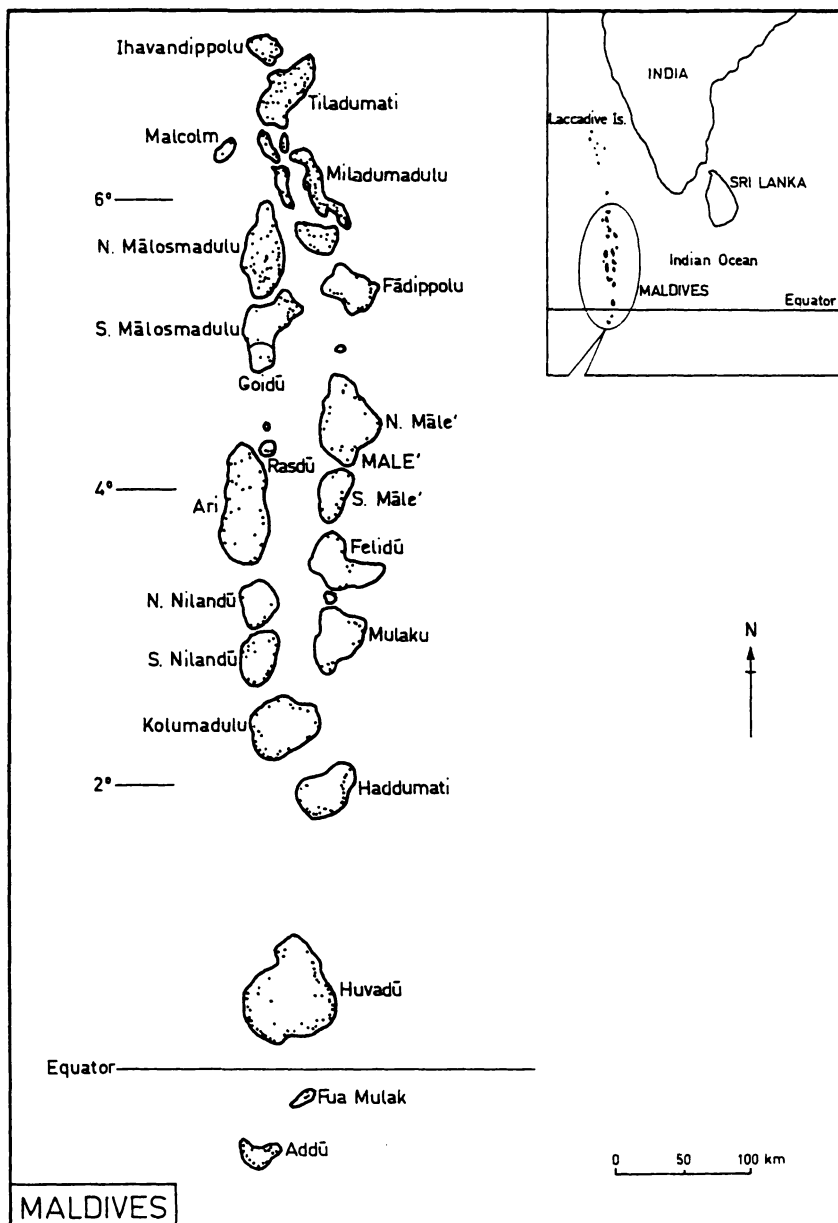
UNDP Human Development Index (1994): 0.611

The Republic of the Maldives is spread out over a vast area of sea, but has a very small aggregate area of land. It is comprised of many islands, which number about 1,200. There is no other way but to state the number in these vague terms, since the islands appear and disappear at the whim of the elements, especially during the most active period of the monsoons. Only 202 islands are inhabited, and they are grouped into 19 administrative atolls.

Despite the fact that the Maldives is a developing country with hardly any natural resources other than sea and fish, the country has various distinctive features. The literacy rate approaches 98 per cent; there are no beggars; every Maldivian is a Muslim; and everybody speaks the national language, Dhivehi. Ethnic difference as a reason for enmity between people is normally brought to the attention of the average Maldivian only by the media. Girls are not kept away from school; and women are not kept away from public life. Unemployment is unheard of.

Another feature of the Maldives is its dependence on the rest of the world for almost everything. The staple food is imported rice. Spices and other condiments that usually make up the curry that accompanies the rice are also imported. Fruits and vegetables, milk, meat, poultry, eggs, and even certain types of fish (for those who relish sardines in tomato sauce!) are imported. Almost all consumer goods from sandals to satellite-dishes come in from outside. To pay for all this, Maldivians engage themselves in three major activities: fishing, shipping and tourism.

Yet while for the most part the Maldives is indeed the paradise that the tourist brochures say it is, the country is not without problems. The Maldives has been catching up with the rest of the world so fast that the



very pace of development has created problems. Members of the older generation complain about new-fangled devices, the Westernised attitudes of young people, and erosion of the cultural heritage. Other serious issues include the shortage of manpower for particular needs. For example, the burgeoning hospitality industry needs many professional and semi-professional workers from accountants to divers and barmen. The fishing industry needs engineers; and the shipping industry needs captains. Unfortunately, there are just not enough such people to meet the demand. Thus, the Maldives finds itself in the position of having to import many skills.

The Education and Examination Systems

The education system in the Maldives is a distinctive mixture of indigenous and foreign characteristics. The dominant values taught at school are Maldivian, but many schools teach in English. Moreover, at the secondary level the number of foreign teachers is greater than the number of Maldivian ones. Also, out of necessity a mix of local and foreign orientations is maintained in the system of public examinations.

Grades 1 to 5 comprise the primary cycle, for which some schools (particularly in the outer islands) teach in Dhivehi, while the others (particularly in the capital and more populous islands) teach in English. Grades 6 and 7 are the middle school stage, which again has a mix of Dhivehi-medium and English-medium schools. No public examinations are taken in the primary or middle schools.

Secondary education commences in Grade 8, at which point all instruction is in English. Most schools prepare their students to sit the University of London Examinations & Assessment Council (ULEAC) General Certificate of Education Ordinary (GCE 'O') level examinations, though one major institution prepares students to sit Arabic-medium alternatives. Grades 11 and 12 are the higher secondary school stage, during which students are prepared for the ULEAC GCE Advanced ('A') level examinations.

Being so small in population, Maldives does not have its own university. Students therefore go abroad for further studies, and require qualifications which are recognised by the institutions to which they seek entry. Maldivian students attend institutions in a wide range of countries, including Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Sri Lanka, the United Kingdom and the USA.

The range of subjects available in the ULEAC GCE 'O' level examinations is broad. It includes Accounting, Art & Design, Biology, Chemistry, Commerce, Computing Studies, Economics, English Language, English Literature, French, Fisheries Science, Geography, German, History, Human Biology, Italian, Mathematics, Pure Mathematics, Physics, Religious Studies,

Spanish, other modern languages, and integrated science. All subjects except one are Mode 1 subjects, which means that the syllabuses are set entirely externally. The exception is Fisheries Science, which is a Mode 2 subject in which syllabuses have been determined in the Maldives (with Canadian and UNESCO assistance) but the papers are set and graded by ULEAC. The examinations are held twice a year. In January 1996, 1,554 candidates from 19 schools sat the examination through 11 centres (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1: Major Public Examinations and Numbers of Candidates, Maldives

<u>Examination</u>	<u>No. of Candidates</u>	<u>Date</u>
International		
ULEAC GCE 'O' Level	1,554	Jan. 1996
ULEAC GCE 'A' Level	276	May/June 1996
UCLES First Certificate in English	179	Dec. 1995
UCLES Certificate of Proficiency in English	104	Dec. 1995
UCLES Cert. of Education in English Lang. Teaching	38	Nov. 1995
London Chamber of Commerce & Industry		Nov. 1995
National		
Civil Service Proficiency	156	April 1996
Secondary School Certificate	1,260	Dec. 1995
Higher Secondary School Certificate	143	Dec. 1995

The range of subjects is also wide in the ULEAC GCE 'A' level examination, though not all have high (or any) demand from Maldivian candidates. Subjects available include Accounting, Art & Design, Biology, Business Studies, Chemistry, Classical Civilisation, Design & Technology, Government & Political Studies, Graphical Communication, Greek, Latin, Law, Mechanics, Statistics, Applied Mathematics, Sociology, Russian, Economics, English Language, English Literature, French, Geography, German, History, Human Biology, Italian, Mathematics, Pure Mathematics, Physics, Religious Studies, Spanish, and other modern languages. The examination is held once a year. In May/June 1996, 276 candidates from two schools sat the examination through three centres (including two centres run directly by the Department of Public Examinations for private candidates).

In addition, since 1988 some students have sat the English-language

examinations set by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES). In December 1995, 179 candidates from three training institutions sat the First Certificate of English examination, and 104 candidates sat the Certificate of Proficiency in English examination. In addition, in November 1995 38 candidates from one institution sat the UCLES examination for the Certificate of Education in English Language Teaching. These examinations were based on international syllabuses published by UCLES.

The final set of international examinations attracting a significant number of candidates is administered by the London Chamber of Commerce & Industry. Subjects covered include Economics, Commerce, Typing, Shorthand, Secretarial Skills, Accounting, Auditing, and Business Management. The examinations are organised five times a year, and in November 1995 attracted candidates from five major institutions.

Contrasting with the international examinations are three major sets of national examinations. The Civil Service Proficiency examinations are held twice a year. In April 1996, 156 candidates sat this examination. Subjects included Mathematics, Government & Institutions, Dhivehi, Islamic Studies, Writing, and English.

Whereas the Civil Service Proficiency examinations mainly cater for adults who have studied in evening classes, the two other national examinations are for the school level. Both cover only two subjects, namely Dhivehi and Islamic Studies. Examinations for the Secondary School Certificate are held twice a year, and in December 1995 were sat by 1,260 candidates from 19 schools. Examinations for the Higher Secondary School Certificate are held once a year, and in December 1995 were sat by 143 candidates in two centres. Islamic Studies, as well as Dhivehi itself, is taught in Dhivehi. For this reason it operates separately from the ULEAC examinations. While it might seem clumsy to require students to sit examinations for two parallel sets of certification, the arrangement does seem to work.

Administration of Public Examinations

The Department of Public Examinations (DPE) was created as a specialised unit within the Ministry of Education in 1989. The Department has broader responsibilities than might be implied by the focus in its name on public examinations. This reflects a multifunctionality in bureaucracies which is common in small states. The Department is responsible for:

- administration of all national and international examinations held in the country,

- state approval of books apart from those written on religious themes,
- authorisation of teachers of Islamic Studies and Recitation of the Holy Quran, and
- endorsement and accreditation of academic credentials.

In 1996, the DPE establishment allowed for five professional staff, two administrative officers, and 12 clerks. The professional posts were for the Director, two Assistant Directors, and two Examinations Officers (one of which was vacant). Any professional service is of course only as strong as its staff, and the whole of the Maldivian public service suffered from a shortage of well-qualified applicants. In 1996, only one person in the DPE was a university graduate. One way to bridge gaps could have been to recruit expatriates who, as mentioned above, were prominent in the secondary schools. However, for reasons of national identity and control, the government preferred not to recruit expatriates for the Ministry headquarters.

Further constraints lie in the ancillary personnel needed to operate the examination system. The need for professional superintendents, invigilators, subject officers, moderators, markers and evaluators, together with the need for qualified educational planners and analysts, simply cannot be met. *Ad hoc* measures are usually taken to secure the cooperation of able persons who can work part-time with the DPE to meet some of the demands. In 1996, 34 people (all of whom were Maldivians) were on the books to provide assistance of various kinds.

In addition to the problems presented by the dearth of qualified professional staff, the DPE is challenged by the geography of the country. The DPE has no dedicated representations in any of the atolls, and has to depend on the Atoll Education Centres for administration of examinations.

The DPE also has to depend on schools and educational centres for facilities when it is time for candidates to sit the examinations. This poses problems to the DPE when schools have other priorities, such as social functions for which the same halls and furniture are needed.

Conclusions

The Maldives has a small population and limited human resources. In addition, the country consists of many islands, scattered over a huge area. These factors create major challenges to administration of all kinds, including administration of examinations.

The lower levels of the education system are strongly oriented to Maldivian culture and national aspirations, but the higher levels have a more international orientation and rely on external examination bodies. The

country has no university of its own.

Chief among the external examination bodies employed by the Maldives is the University of London Examinations & Assessment Council. The country has a long relationship with ULEAC, though recent years have brought some questioning of the cost of the arrangement, which is a major drain on foreign exchange. The London examinations have some neutrality and status derived from distance (i.e. that London is far away). However, questions have also been raised about the relevance of the syllabuses. Only for Fisheries Science at 'O' level does ULEAC do any special tailoring for the Maldivian context.

In addition, the Maldivian government operates two parallel examinations, in Dhivehi and Islamic Studies, to complement the ULEAC work. This arrangement satisfies national concerns for control of these subjects which have strong cultural relevance. However, the range of public examinations is quite broad, and is a heavy load for the Department of Public Examinations within the Ministry of Education. Moreover, to the mainstream activities of the DPE are periodically added additional ones. State approval of books and authorization of teachers in Islamic Studies are among these tasks. Also, in 1995 the Department organised a Shahada Thaanawiyya examination for students in the Arabic-medium secondary school; and the following year the Department was instructed to organise a Presidential Scholarship Award for students in Faafu Atoll.

Since the Maldives' neighbours already have well-established examination systems which serve their own needs, there seems little possibility of organising a regional examination system which would serve the Maldives' needs. The Indian ocean does contain other small states, including Seychelles and Mauritius which have related colonial legacies. However, Maldives has little contact with these countries, and air travel would only be through an indirect and costly route. For the foreseeable future, therefore, it would seem that the two main options for examinations in the Maldives are either for the DPE to take over all functions or for reliance on the metropolitan bodies to continue. Since Maldives has limited professional capacity, and since the authorities are anxious to retain international links and recognition at least for the major secondary school examinations, it seems unlikely, at least in the near future, that the Maldives will develop its own 'O' and 'A' level examinations. However, there is always scope for renegotiation of existing arrangements with ULEAC.