
MALDIVES

Introduction

The Republic of Maldives is a nation of islands, situated about 400 miles south west of Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean. It consists of 1190 coral islands spread well over 90,000 square miles. The islands are grouped into 26 natural atolls that together form a chain 820 km in length and 130 km at its widest point. Administratively, the islands are grouped into 20 atolls.

The population of 275,000 people (Census 2003) lives on 200 islands. The people are ethnically heterogeneous incorporating Indian, Singhalese, Arabian and African elements. Islam is the only religion and 100 percent of the population is Sunni Muslims.

The Maldivian economy is largely based on fishing and tourism. Fishing accounts for about 60% of all export trade. The catch is primarily tuna. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for 2004 was US\$644.5 million. The GDP growth rate for 2004 was 8.5 percent. In spite of the problem of small size and the fragmented dispersal of population, the economy of the Maldives has recorded impressive growth during the last 20 years. Particularly tourism has developed at a remarkable rate and has now become the mainstay of the Maldivian economy. The tourist arrivals are expected to reach 500,000 mark by the end of year 2003, mainly from Western Europe, Japan and Australia.

Drug Situation - Past

In the Maldives, drug trafficking and drug abuse has risen in recent years largely due to increased exposure to the outside world. Drug abuse was not a problem before the mid 1970s. Though there were stories of opium abuse in the early part of this century, this was by and large, limited to a few. The appearance of drug abuse in the present form coincided with the development of tourism in the country in early seventies. However, it would be hasty to suggest a cause and effect relationship between the two, since the period also coincided with many other changes, including global escalation of drug abuse and increased overseas travel by Maldivians.

Maldives lies not too far from the golden crescent and golden triangle with the introduction of tourism in early seventies hundreds of tourists arrive daily from Europe South East Asia and South Asia. Maldives is very well connected with the outside world with its international airport and sea ports. It is potentially vulnerable as a point for illegal shipments of precursor chemicals or large quantities of drugs meant for other countries.

Official recognition of the problem came in 1977 when a person was arrested with 350 grams of hashish. As a result, the first principal legislative act of the Maldives dealing with narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances (Law No 17/77 - The Law on Drugs) was passed the same

year in order to help the legal system deal with it, and to act as a deterrent. Commonly abused substances since then have been hashish oil and heroin. **In 1996 a total of 241 cases of substance abuse were reported to the Police.** It is suspected that a considerable amount of drugs is smuggled into the country via sea vessels that dock at ports. However, random rummaging of sea vessels has detected relatively little quantities. The rapid increase in drug abuse is of great concern to health and law enforcement authorities. Prior to 1993, the majority of drug offenders were between the age of 25 and 40 years.

Drug Situation - Present

In 1993 the first case of heroin was detected. With the introduction of heroin, drug abuse among young age group escalated dramatically. Currently the age group consists mainly of males between 16 and 25 years. In 1998, over 450 arrests were made on drug abuse and related offences. The first major seizure of cocaine was made in September 1993 at Malé International Airport when 8 kilograms of cocaine was found concealed in the false bottoms of a suitcase in the possession of a foreign national. In 1997, three Maldivians were discovered to have orchestrated an attempt to smuggle in 1372 grams of hashish oil in seven professionally packed cans of corned beef while they were about to board a flight to Malé from Trivandrum Airport. For a small country like Maldives, this is an alarming trend.

Despite stringent drug laws, intensive efforts to prevent drug entry by several agencies there has been growing concern about the problem of drug abuse. In order to prepare a National Master Plan for Drug Abuse Control in the country government sought UNODC to support a detailed assessment of the drug scenario in the country. A preparatory mission visited Maldives in 1999 with financial support provided by UNODC to prepare guidelines Rapid Situation Assessment Survey.

UNDP Maldives funded the RSA as Project MDV/00/04 and the report was formally released in 2003. This report provides window into the drug abuse scenario in the country. In the survey what is alarming is that drugs users were mainly in their early twenties and the mean age of the respondent was 21.4 years (15 to 42 years). Almost half the respondents were below 20 years of age, 32% were 20-24 years and 13% were in the age group of 25-29 years. The opioid (heroin) and cannabinoids (hashish) are the most frequently used drugs. The most common reason for initiation was peer pressure (38%), followed by desire to experiment (26%). The findings of RSA highlight the urgent need for development of multi pronged strategies in the prevention and treatment of drugs users.

Preventive Measures - Law on Drugs

Given the current situation as reflected in the survey, the Government of the Maldives believes that immediate action has to be taken in order to protect the youth of this country. A number of measures have already been taken to control the situation. The control of supply through various

enforcement agencies like custom and police has been upgraded and given top priority. The demand reduction aspect is under narcotics control board (NCB). In the primary prevention the Government has taken the initiatives to amend the law and many awareness programmes have been instituted. The principal Legislative Act of the Maldives dealing with narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances is Law No. 17/77 (The Law on Drugs) which was enacted in 1977 to deal with the few cases of drug abuse detected in the country at that time. The law on drugs then was thus very simple and reflective of prevailing situation at that time. However due to many changes that have taken place in the country since the adoption of the first Law, the government revised the Law to effectively deal with the drug menace and to take measures to combat drug trafficking and to prevent the abuse of drugs in the changed circumstances. Consequently, the Government in 1995 introduced substantial amendments to Law No. 17/77 by providing for severe penalties for manufacture, importation and sale of narcotic drugs in the Maldives. The Law at present prescribes life imprisonment for such offences. Further, for the first time, provisions were made for treatment and rehabilitation of drug users. The amendment of 1995, provide a comprehensive mechanism for the treatment and rehabilitation of drug users and a system of parole for the first time users. The amended law also has two tables, one containing a list of prohibited drugs and the other containing a list of controlled substances.

The Government of the Republic of Maldives is determined to bring about a reduction in the demand for and the supply of illicit drugs. This determination was reinforced with the establishment on the 16th November 1997 of the Narcotics Control Board which is responsible for coordinating demand reduction efforts, management of rehabilitation programmes, and maintaining communication with national and international drug control and law enforcement agencies.

Awareness Programmes

A number of continuing Drug Awareness Programmes which are aimed at various sectors within the community are being conducted or organized by the Narcotics Control Board. An awareness programme for all the parents of school children of Grade 7 in schools of Malé is conducted annually. The Atoll Awareness Programme aims to cover the entire Maldives within the next three years, with Programmes conducted in every inhabited island in the country. These awareness programmes target atoll and island chiefs, healthcare workers, teachers and island committee chairpersons. Seven atolls have so far been covered under this programme. A prevention programme is being planned to run for all Atoll Chiefs and Island Chiefs in Male', outlines a comprehensive plan of action. The development of youth counsellors for the atolls is also a major concern. Television and Radio advertisements about the dangers of drugs are routinely shown and information is available to the public.

Workshops and training programmes are being organised to ensure that necessary skills are given to officials of law enforcement authorities, counsellors and staff of NGOs.

In the secondary prevention the NCB is providing treatment facilities to drug users. It has recently

started the medical detoxification services at its rehabilitation centre at Himmafushi Island. In the area of tertiary prevention we are rehabilitating the affected individuals. There is a plan to upgrade the facilities at its Half way house.

The NCB has also started a training course for counselors to overcome shortage of manpower in this area.

Recently the Government has formed a National task Force in the area of substance use to coordinate and plan various activities.

Precursor Control, Cultivation of Crops and Production

With regard to precursor chemicals, we are fortunate that there is yet, no manufacturing or production of illicit drugs taking place in the Maldives. The drug problem in the Maldives is presently restricted to the smuggling of regionally available opiate and cannabis derivatives and the increasing abuse of the same. The Section 2 and Section 3 of the Law on Drugs prohibit the manufacture, in any form of prohibited drugs in the Maldives. It also prohibits the manufacture of controlled substances in violation of the law. These provisions also make the importation, supply, possession and sale of chemicals for the manufacture of narcotic drugs and controlled substances, punishable on the same basis as the offence of trafficking.

Further, with the absence of chemicals and related industries, the regulation of the importation and use of precursor chemicals would not be very complex. In the Maldives, where there is no manufacturing, cultivation or production of illicit drugs, the government's anti-drug policy is aimed to stop narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals from entering the country.

As Maldives is not a producer of any type of drugs, there has never been any case of illegal importation of precursors or any other type of chemicals used for illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances. There is also no visible threat in the near future of any smuggling of these chemicals for the manufacturing of illicit drugs. Nevertheless, the geographical location and the formation of the country makes Maldives a very ideal place for a potential trafficker with an eye for new places to be used for diversion points of illegal shipments of precursor chemicals or large quantities of drugs intended for another country.

Officers from various government institutions generally have a fairly good knowledge of precursors, thanks to international organizations especially UNODC Regional Office for South Asia, who have provided continuous training through seminars workshops material support, and providing experts to advise government on precursor chemical control measures. Since 1999 a total of 32 officers from national competent authorities have participated in 10 overseas programmes sponsored by UNODC-ROSA. During this period 6 senior officials of the government also had participated Colombo Plan DAP sponsored programmes on precursor chemical controls overseas.

Besides this a number of in house capacity building programmes were organized in collaboration with NCB and Maldives Customs Services. UNODC Regional Office conducted three such programmes in Maldives where officials from regional and local law enforcement officials took part. A total of 70 local law enforcement officials have benefited from these training programmes.

Law enforcement officers will remain vigilant to the possibility that in the future Maldives could be used as a transit point for precursor traffickers. The possibility exists that our territory in the shipment of precursors via sea going vessels. The difficulty in policing these areas makes the country even more vulnerable. Under the existing rules prior import authorization must be obtained before such chemicals can be brought into the country. Maldives is not an exporter of precursor related chemicals. Under the existing control regime, the Ministry of Health receives Pre Export Notifications (PENs) from various countries and it then notifies the Ministry of Defense and National Security which is responsible for issuing security clearance to Maldives Customs authorities.

The principal legislative acts that deal with drugs and precursor related chemicals are Law No. 17/77 (The Law on Drugs) and Law No. 4/75 (The Law on Items Prohibited to be Brought in to Maldives) These laws prescribe heavy sentences for drug offenders, but currently do not cover sufficiently the trafficking of precursor chemicals. To address this issue, the government sought technical assistance from UNODC Regional Office in New Delhi. A senior legal expert visited Maldives in 2003 who had extensive consultation with government ministries and other concerned departments. A draft precursor control legislation has now been presented to the Office of the Attorney General, which once enacted will regulate and reinforce import, and distribution of pharmaceuticals including chemicals. UNODC Precursor Control Project also arranged a high level government mission to visit India in 2003 on a study mission to observe current precursor control mechanisms in India. This mission comprised of the Attorney General, Head of Maldives Customs and the Commissioner of Narcotics Control Board. The draft precursor control legislation is expected to be sent to the parliament once it is reviewed by the Attorney General's Office, Law Commission and other relevant authorities.

<i>Substance</i>	<i>Quantity</i>
<i>Acetone</i>	<i>24751 kg</i>
<i>Hydrochloric acid</i>	<i>7670 kg</i>
<i>Methyl ethyl ketone</i>	<i>585 kg</i>
<i>Potassium permanganate</i>	<i>233 kg</i>
<i>Safrol</i>	<i>0.03 kg</i>
<i>Sulphuric acid</i>	<i>41768 ltr</i>
<i>Toluene</i>	<i>77 ltr</i>

(Source: NCB Biannual report on precursors for 2002)

Role of NGOs and International Organisations

The role of the non-government sector has increased in the area of drug abuse prevention. One of the local NGOs has made drug abuse prevention part of their mandate and is currently undertaking projects to complement the role of the government in this field. Another local NGO has been addressing the issue of drug abuse in the health education programmes that they carry out nationally.

Maldives is actively working with the SAARC member states in combating the spread of illicit drug trafficking within the region. The Government of the Republic of Maldives is currently in the process of reviewing the 1988 United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, and hence will be ratifying it in the near future. It will continue to address the menace of illicit drugs as an issue of national importance.

Many important workshops and training programmes have been carried out recently with the cooperation of various international agencies to increase awareness among local government officials. Customs officials and operational staff from regional airports/seaports met in May 1999 to exchange information on recent trends of drug smuggling within this region, which proved to be very useful.

The Government is thankful to the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) Regional Office for South Asia for their support and cooperation in its efforts to combat drug menace. Drug Advisory Programme of the Colombo Plan has been providing continuous support to Maldives in terms of training of staff and other related fields.

Rehabilitation and Treatment Programmes

The Drug Rehabilitation Center was officially opened in 1997. Currently, a total of 99 males and 15 females are receiving residential treatment for drug dependence. There are close to 100 clients in community rehabilitation. The clients are mostly referred from the court system but the number of voluntary clients has increased significantly.

In both residential and non-residential treatment, the clients receive comprehensive drug education and psychotherapeutic intervention in their drug abuse problems. Cognitive behavioural therapy is employed in assisting the clients to deal with various aspects of their lives and their selves. Some of the therapeutic programmes included in the daily programmes are anger management, drug education, and problem solving skills and overcoming depression. In addition, a structured daily physical exercise programme is implemented, and various educational and skills workshops are held regularly.

In community rehabilitation, the focus is on relapse prevention, targeting at resolving the problems clients face in the community. Community rehabilitation is structured in various stages, allowing the clients to become gradually stabilized and self-reliant.

Conclusion

The government fully recognizes the threat drugs pose to the world community, especially to small developing countries like Maldives. The Drug Law enforcement agencies of Maldives have achieved a high degree of cooperation among themselves to put up a united front against the menace of drugs. Discussions are underway with the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC) Regional Office for South Asia, and other donor agencies to formulate a National Master Plan for Drug Control in Maldives.