

OFFICIAL NAME: Republic of Maldives

CAPITAL: Male

SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT: Republic

AREA: 298 Sq Km (115 Sq Mi)

ESTIMATED 2000 POPULATION: 287,200

LOCATION & GEOGRAPHY: Maldives is an archipelago of atolls located in the north central Indian Ocean. The territory is comprised of 1,190 islands, of which 202 are inhabited. Generally, the islands are low with many tiny banks washed by the ocean while some atolls are encircled by reefs. Others are made up of small ring shaped reefs while many contain fresh water lagoons and have marshy coastal areas. Major Cities (pop. est.); Male 55,100 (1990). Land Use; forested 3%, pastures 3%, agricultural-cultivated 10%, other 84% (1993).

CLIMATE: The Maldives has a tropical climate characterized by hot and humid conditions with little daily variation. The islands are subject to the SW Monsoon between June and August, and the NE Monsoon from November to March. Average annual precipitation is 2,540 mm (100 inches) in the north and 3,810 mm (150 inches) in the south. The average temperature ranges are from 25 degrees Celsius (77 degrees Fahrenheit) to 29 degrees Celsius (84 degrees Fahrenheit) all year.

PEOPLE: The people of Maldives are divided into four main ethnic strains. The Sinhalese, the Dravidian, the Arabs and the Black Africans. The only ethnic minority are the Indians.

DEMOGRAPHIC/VITAL STATISTICS: Density; 745 persons per sq km (1,930 persons per sq mi) (1991). Urban-Rural; 25.9% urban, 74.1% rural (1990). Sex Distribution; 51.3% male, 48.7% female (1990). Life Expectancy at Birth; 66.0 years male, 64.1 years female (1990). Age Breakdown; 47% under 15, 27% 15 to 29, 12% 30 to 44, 9% 45 to 59, 4% 60 to 74, 1% 75 and over (1990). Birth Rate; 41.0 per 1,000 (1990). Death Rate; 6.0 per 1,000 (1990). Increase Rate; 35.0 per 1,000 (1990). Infant Mortality Rate; 34.0 per 1,000 live births (1990).

RELIGIONS: The official religion is Islam with the overwhelming majority Sunni Muslims.

LANGUAGES: The official language is Divehi, which is also the national language and the dialect of Sinhalese with a script derived from Arabic. English is also spoken by most government officials.

EDUCATION: Aged 25 or over and having attained: no formal schooling 31.2%, primary 30.6%, secondary 3.5%, vocational 34.4%, higher 0.2%, unspecified 0.2% (1985). Literacy; literate population aged 15 or over 90,189 or 90.4% (1985).

MODERN HISTORY - WWII TO 1993: As a British protectorate, the Maldives received internal self-government while Britain handled their foreign affairs and defense. In the 1950's a dispute between the Maldivians and the British over an air base on Gan Island led to the secession of three southern atolls. The Maldivian government accused Britain of invoking a rebellion and subsequently crushed it. In 1960 Britain and the Maldives signed an agreement that gave Britain free use of the Gan Island base. On July 26, 1965 the Maldives gained complete independence from Britain with Ibrahim Nasir as Prime Minister. After a referendum in Nov. 1968 the Maldives became a republic and Nasir was elected President. In 1976 Britain withdrew from the Gan Island air base and in 1978 Nasir stood down and left the country. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom was elected as the Maldives next President. Pres. Gayoom was reelected in Sept. 1983 as well as Sept. 1988 and also survived three individual coup attempts in 1980, 1981 and 1988 with the 1988 coup only suppressed after India sent troops to defeat the mercenaries. In 1985 the Maldives and six other countries established the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which is a regional association that deals with social and economic issues. Also in the same year the Maldives became a full member of the Commonwealth after its "Special Membership Status" was granted in 1982. In 1991 the Maldives received assistance from the UN FAO's Bay of Bengal Program (BOBP) that attempted to improve small-scale fisheries' income and productivity with lower costs as well as carried out a program to determine the abundance of Tuna in the Maldives' offshore waters. In the same year the government imposed press censorship in an attempt to quell the growing demands for a fully elected legislature (Majlis). In 1992 Pres. Gayoom attended the sixth annual SAARC summit in Colombo, Sri Lanka and later lifted visa restrictions for tourists from Sri Lanka. Also in 1992 there was growing opposition to Pres. Gayoom's regime from young Maldivians with allegations of corruption. In Jan. 1993 some 25% of shares in the state-owned Bank of Maldives were offered to the public and in Oct. 1993 Pres. Gayoom was reelected for another five year term.

CURRENCY: The official currency is the Rufiyaa (Rf) divided into 100 Laari.

ECONOMY: Gross National Product; USD \$194,000,000 (1993). Public Debt; USD \$111,600,000 (1993). Imports; Rf 2,096,704,000 (1993). Exports; Rf 377,397,000 (1993). Tourism Receipts; USD \$146,000,000 (1993). Balance of Trade; USD -\$133,700,000 (1993). Economically Active Population; 56,435 or 26.5% of total population (1990). Unemployed; 0.9% (1990).

MAIN TRADING PARTNERS: Its main trading partners are Japan, Sri Lanka, Thailand and the USA.

MAIN PRIMARY PRODUCTS: Coconuts, Fish, Fruit and Vegetables.

MAJOR INDUSTRIES: Agriculture, Boat Building, Fishing, Fish Processing, Garments, Handicrafts, Tourism.

MAIN EXPORTS: Canned Processed Fish, Garments.

TRANSPORT: Railroads; nil. Roads; N/A. Vehicles; cars 623 (1990), trucks and buses 813 (1990). Merchant Marine; vessels 45 (1990), deadweight tonnage 122,801 (1990). Air Transport; N/A.

COMMUNICATIONS: Daily Newspapers; total of 2 with a total circulation of 4,300 (1993). Radio; receivers 25,000 (1994). Television; receivers 8,523 (1994). Telephones; units 8,523 (1992).

MILITARY: Around 1,000 (1993) total active duty personnel.