

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



Unofficial Translation of the  
**2006 Presidential Address**

Male'

23 February 2006

*Honourable Speaker of the People's Majlis:*

*A'salaamu-alaikum,*

Today, I visit this distinguished Majlis to fulfil my duty, in accordance with Article 42 of the Constitution, of making a statement declaring the policies of the Government, and to declare open the sessions of the People's Majlis for this year, as prescribed under Law no. 1/68 (xxiii).

May I first extend my sincere gratitude to the Honourable Speaker of the People's Majlis for the kind sentiments that he just expressed, on behalf of the Honourable Member's of the Majlis. I wish to also thank you, the Honourable Members, for welcoming me here today.

*Honourable Speaker:*

As in previous years, the main policies of the Government for the next twelve months will be founded on:

- Safeguarding the independence and sovereignty of the nation, and on protecting the tenets and the principles of the Islamic faith;
- Relentlessly pursuing, with the blessings of the Almighty Allah, the goal of fully recovering as a nation from the devastating effects of the December 2004 tsunami;
- Improving the quality of life and prosperity of the people;
- Protecting fundamental rights, consolidating unity and social harmony among the people and promoting national peace and stability; and
- Accelerating the Government's sweeping democratic reform agenda.

The key policies for this year in the area of governance and administration will be:

- Strengthening the administrative structure of governance through an efficient and decentralised framework for the provision of public services; and
- Introducing more efficient standards for monitoring the performance of public institutions, improving the standards of service of Government employees, accelerating the delivery of public services and carrying out reforms to promote a more result-oriented administration.

The main economic policies will be:

- Pursuing further development in the key economic sectors of fisheries, tourism, business and commerce, agriculture, and handicrafts to increase the benefits and revenue that they generate for people who are gainfully employed in these sectors, and to the economy as a whole; and
- Implementing policies for a more inclusive distribution of the economic benefits of national development.

The Government's priorities for the social sector for this year will be:

- Combating the menace of narcotic drugs and reducing crime;
- Enhancing family ties, social harmony and national solidarity, protecting the fundamental rights of all citizens, promoting gender equality and facilitating youth development;
- Improving the quality of education, providing greater education opportunities and developing vocational skills; and
- Improving the standards of healthcare and raising awareness on health issues.

The main focus of foreign policy for this year will be:

- Safeguarding national independence and sovereignty, promoting peace and cooperation, and enhancing the prestige and dignity of the country in the international community; and

- Forging closer bilateral and multilateral ties with development partners.

*Honourable Speaker:*

A number of important reforms have already been implemented, as part of my democratic reform agenda, including the introduction of political parties, the establishment of a Judicial Services Commission, enhancing the freedom of the press, and strengthening human rights protection in the Maldives.

Most of the bills that the Government hopes to table before this distinguished Majlis during this first session of 2006 will put in place crucial democratic reforms. They include the Political Parties Bill, the National Security Service Bill, the Police Bill and a new Penal Code.

The Government is also working on drafting a number of other key reform bills, which will be tabled before this distinguished Majlis during 2006. Further, important legislation on social and economic development will also be tabled during the year.

The ongoing work to revise the Constitution is also an important part of the sweeping democratic reform agenda that I initiated in 2003. I wish to take this opportunity to call upon the Honourable Members of the People's Special Majlis to work in the spirit of cooperation and to successfully conclude their work as soon as possible.

Key judicial reforms proposed for the next twelve months include the establishment of a system of arbitration in the Maldives.

Groundwork is being laid to establish a Civil Service Commission in the Maldives. Plans are also being made to establish a Public Service Training Institute, which will focus on increasing the efficiency of the Government by training members of staff of Government bodies in a variety of important skills.

*Honourable Speaker:*

The national economy registered a promising 9.5% rate of growth during 2004. However, the devastating effects of the tsunami and the closure of the garment factories had together led to a sharp decline in the growth of the economy during 2005.

I assure this distinguished Majlis that the Government remains fully committed to continuing, with the same urgency and commitment as in 2005, the ongoing efforts to attain full national recovery from the tsunami. I take this opportunity to extend my deep gratitude to the Maldivian people for the support and assistance that they have extended to the Government in the tsunami recovery efforts, and for the exemplary solidarity and community spirit that they continue to display in facing up to this most important of national endeavours.

The Government is fully focused on securing all pledged donor assistance towards tsunami recovery efforts in the Maldives, and will also continue to lobby for more aid in bridging the existing funding gap in the recovery programme.

Work on repair and reconstruction of homes damaged or destroyed by the tsunami is ongoing, and people are moving back to permanent shelter.

Although last year's tourist arrival numbers were lower than that of the previous year, the industry had nevertheless registered vastly improved arrival figures by the end of the year, as a result of the vigorous marketing and promotional activities of the Government and industry personnel.

As tourism is the most profitable economic activity in the country, work on leasing a further 35 islands for development of tourist resorts will, with the Grace of the Almighty Allah, begin soon. A public limited company will soon be established to enable members of the public to buy shares and join the Government in the development of tourist resorts.

Resorts built on inhabited islands will be developed by a public company jointly owned by the Government and members of the public.

*Honourable Speaker:*

The Government will embark on a programme to facilitate greater involvement of the private sector in investing in the fisheries and agriculture sectors, to accelerate economic growth and to increase employment opportunities for the people. A programme will also be carried out during the year to increase the productivity of fisheries and agriculture as food sources for the population, and to increase agricultural crop varieties in the Maldives in a sustainable manner.

This year, the Government will endeavour, as a special priority, to increase the existing capacity for freezing and storage of fish catch.

This year, the Government will carry out a study to identify areas with potential for foreign investment. There is no doubt that foreign direct investment will raise standards of living and facilitate greater economic development. Also, work on formulating the legislative framework for creating a business and investor-friendly environment in the Maldives will continue throughout the year.

Efforts to relocate communities to islands with better economic prospects, as part of the population-development consolidation programme, had progressed throughout the previous year. Those whose homes were damaged or destroyed by the tsunami, as well as other communities volunteering to relocate, are also being relocated under the programme.

The population consolidation programme will continue throughout this year as well. Donor-supported projects to relocate island communities will also carry on.

As of next year, the Maldives College of Higher Education is to be upgraded to the status of a University. Preparatory work for this transition is currently ongoing. I firmly believe that the establishment of a University in the Maldives is an important milestone in the country's development.

As part of the efforts to improve secondary education standards in the Maldives, the Government hopes to facilitate access to secondary education to a greater number of youths.

The health and welfare of the people and the standard of healthcare in the country are matters of great importance for the Government.

The Government has done the necessary groundwork on establishing a national health insurance scheme, and hopes to launch a health insurance scheme for Government employees during this year.

Based on the success of this scheme, it will be extended to Government companies, those employed in the private sector and to members of the general public who wish to be covered under the scheme.

Also, this year, atoll hospitals will be established in all remaining atolls. Additional programmes will be also implemented throughout the year to improve the standard of service at the Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital, and to introduce new facilities at IGMH.

The setting-up of Health Centres and Health Posts on more islands is also ongoing across the country, to facilitate more convenient healthcare for people in the Atolls.

I have set up a Cabinet Sub-Committee to advise me on taking urgent precautionary measures against the rapidly-spreading Bird Flu epidemic from reaching the Maldives. It is of the utmost importance that members of the public take heed to the advice issued by the relevant authorities for their personal safety and wellbeing, even if it may be of some inconvenience for the time being.

The National Policy on the Family will be drawn-up this year. These policies mark important milestones in the overall efforts to promote closer family ties. With the Grace of the Almighty Allah, the Government hopes to set up Social Protection Centres in each and every Atoll and in the wards of Male', in the next three years.

An awareness programme for young parents will be launched on this year's Youth Day, to provide vital information and skills training on parenthood for young parents.

One of the toughest challenges facing the Maldives today is that of narcotic drug abuse. New life has been added during 2005 to the National Campaign to Rid the Country of the Drugs Menace.

A new regulation has been drawn-up and enforced to strengthen the framework and procedure under which drug offenders undergo rehabilitation and treatment in isolation from the community. It is vitally important that drug abusers are fully rehabilitated before they rejoin the society.

Facilities and services in the two rehabilitation centres in the country will be improved in 2006. The Government also plans to draft a bill on rehabilitating drug offenders. We hope to table this bill before this distinguished Majlis during 2006.

As part of the efforts to increase accommodation and housing for the people, the ongoing work to build new houses and one-room apartments in Hulhumale' is expected to be completed and put up for sale, during 2006.

Construction on building more flats on Hulhumale' will commence during the year, as will the sale of additional residential plots on the island. The Government has also begun the process of selling plots for development of condominium housing on Hulhumale'.

The first draft of the 7<sup>th</sup> National Development Plan has been completed, and Government authorities have now begun taking practical measures to implement the objectives highlighted for the first six months of

the year. Also, consultations on the Plan will be held throughout the year at the regional and national levels, and it is expected to be published towards the end of 2006.

Under the special project to dredge harbours and improve accessibility to inhabited islands, work was carried out simultaneously in six regions of the country during last year. Work of the project will be accelerated this year to include additional islands.

I take this opportunity to urge the people to extend their full support and cooperation during next month's National Census work across the country.

The tsunami disaster of 2004 highlighted the environmental vulnerability of the Maldives. We must therefore be more aware of the strains on our natural environment from our way of life, and work in partnership to preserve and protect our fragile environment. This would no doubt be a worthy contribution at a time when our efforts are geared towards recovering from the effects of the tsunami.

This year, the Government hopes to formulate a five-year policy on the development of the telecommunications sector, based on the progress in implementing the National Telecommunications Policy 2001-2005. The Government hopes to establish e-government capability in the Maldives, utilising the government network as the backbone. The government network project is expected to be completed this year, and e-government capability is to be established midway through next year.

The Government has tabled four important Bills on the freedom of the media and information, as part of the reforms to strengthen press

freedom in the Maldives. Further, a Broadcasting Bill and a Cable Television Bill are presently in the drafting stage.

While the media in the Maldives are today enjoying much greater freedom than at any previous time in their history, this freedom must not be abused through defamation, disinformation and incitement to hatred and violence. We must promote a responsible press and uphold the cultural and traditional high standards of behaviour in our society.

*Honourable Speaker:*

At this time of tremendous political transformation, our top priority must be to sustain peace and harmony in the country. It is a national duty of each and every Maldivian to respect individual rights, uphold law and order and promote high behavioural standards in society.

It is very regrettable that respect for law and order has declined lately. The entire community will face the adverse effects of this, and the high standards of national solidarity in the Maldives could very well diminish as well. The behaviour of our children will also be affected negatively as a result of these bad examples. Lawlessness will no doubt present great dangers for the welfare of our future generations.

I strongly urge each and every citizen of the Maldives to fully respect the laws and regulations in the country.

*Honourable Speaker:*

Last year, I extended an invitation to all the political parties to hold joint discussions on formulating a roadmap for the implementation of the democratic reform programme.

So far, we have not received a favourable response to this invitation. Reforms cannot be delayed. I have therefore decided to go ahead with the work on formulating a roadmap on the key reforms to be implemented in the time ahead. This important document will be released before the end of March, and will include timeframes for each important aspect of the democratic reform programme.

I firmly believe that all the political parties operating in the Maldives should work for the benefit and welfare of the people, and for the further development of the Maldives. Although political parties more often than not promote contrasting policy packages, it is vitally important that all the parties share the commitment to uphold the best interest of our beloved nation.

*Honourable Speaker:*

2005 was a very active year for this distinguished Majlis. The role of the People's Majlis was very evident in the manner in which Honourable Members had deliberated on key pieces of legislation and other matters of national significance.

I wish to express my sincere thanks to the Speaker and the Members of this distinguished Majlis, for the manner in which they discharged their important national duties during the past year. I am confident that the distinguished Members will continue to extend their full support to the

Government in the ongoing work to attain greater national development and progress in the time ahead.

With this statement and with the Name and Grace of the Almighty Allah, I declare open the People's Majlis for 2006.

I pray to the Almighty Allah to:

- Bless the Maldivian people in remaining steadfastly on the Islamic faith and tenets,
- Sustain our love for independence, sovereignty and brotherhood,
- Grant us the wisdom to maintain national independence, peace and sovereignty and the vision to attain greater development and prosperity, and
- Bless our wish to successfully conclude the ongoing efforts introduce sweeping democratic reforms in the Maldives.

Thank you!