

# TIMELINE OF MEDIA RELATED INCIDENTS IN THE MALDIVES

2014 - 2017



## 8 AUGUST

**28-YEAR-OLD MALDIVIAN JOURNALIST MISSING**

Ahmed Rilwan Abdulla, a reporter for *The Maldives Independent*, was last seen travelling by ferry to Hulhumale Island from Male on Friday morning 8 August 2014. On 2 April 2016, after a lengthy and inadequate investigation, Maldivian chief inspector Abdulla Satheeh confirmed allegations made by human rights NGO and the Maldivian Democracy Network that Rilwan was abducted by member of the Kuda Henveiru gang.



Ahmed Rilwan Abdulla  
Credit: findmoyameehaa.com



Find Moyameehaa rally in April that, Maldives



**15 FEBRUARY****SENIOR JOURNALIST RECEIVES DEATH THREATS**

A senior Journalist at *Raajje TV* received a death threat via phone and text message on Sunday 15 February 2015. Abdulla Yamin, a member of the Maldives parliament, had called the journalist regarding a former employee and request that said employee be allowed into the building to collect his belongings. Yamin was told that the belongings would need to be cleared by security first. Following the conversation, the journalist received a called from an unknown number and was told if “Raajje TV did not do as Yamin said he will be killed within the next hour and the station will be vandalized.” The incident was taken to the police, and extra security called in.

**15 OCTOBER****JOURNALIST THREATENED AND WEBSITE HACKED**

The *Addu Live* new website, operating out of Addu City, southern Maldives, was threatened after it began reporting on the presidential impeachment. Within three hours of the articles going live, the office received a call from an overseas number demanding the reports taken offline or the site hacked. *Addu Live* refused to remove the content, the site was subsequently hacked and down for over a week.



Mohamad Wisam and Leevan Ali Naseer

**2 NOVEMBER****TWO JOURNALISTS ARRESTED WHILE REPORTING**

Mohamad Wisam and Leevan Ali Naseer, journalists at *Raajje TV*, were arrested as they reported on police and military attempts to defuse a bomb found near the Presidential Palace. On 2 November 2016, they were summoned to the criminal court, facing charges of “obstructing the discharging of police duties”.

**13 FEBRUARY****JOURNALIST ARRESTED BY PLAIN-CLOTHED POLICEMEN AT NEWSROOM**

Hussain Fariyaz, a sports journalist at *Rajje TV*, was arrested when officers entered the *Rajje TV* newsroom. Images of the event show Fariyaz being manhandled and his clothes ripped. The Police later admitted the arrest was a mistake. *Raajje TV* claims the arrest was the result of a photo taken by Fariyaz at a rally of an officer taking alcohol, the police insist he had “disobeyed orders” on the day by fleeing when asked for his media pass.

**3 APRIL****JOURNALISTS ARRESTED FOR PROTESTING CRACKDOWN ON MEDIA FREEDOMS**

Journalists from various local media organisations held a demonstration in Male protesting recent crackdowns on media freedoms, including the proposed criminal defamation law, the court-ordered closure of *Haveeru* newspaper, and the protracted investigation into the disappearance of journalist Ahmed Rilwan in 2014. Police arrested 19 journalists and used pepper spray and excessive force to end the demonstration.



Demonstrators protest the closure of *Haveeru*



## 27 JULY

**TWO JOURNALISTS ARRESTED DURING PRAYER IN MALE**

Hussain Fiyaz Moosa, chief operating officer of *Raajje TV*, and Ahmed Azif, assistant editor of *Sun Online*, were detained while opposition supporters attempted to perform prayer inside the Islamic Centre in Male. Fiyaz was arrested inside the mosque, while Azif was arrested as he entered. They were respectively accused of planning political activity and taking photographs inside the mosque and of obstructing police duty.



Journalists protest media crackdown  
Credit: Mohamed Afra

## 9 AUGUST

**MALDIVIAN GOVERNMENT INTRODUCES THE ANTI-DEFAMATION AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION ACT**

Maldivian government introduces new law that criminalises defamatory speech, remarks, writing and actions and gives the government the authority to shut-down media organisations for defamatory content. The Act also outlines fines for organisations if found guilty of slander - between MVR 25,000 (USD 1,621) and MVR 2 million (USD130,000) or up to six months imprisonment, and for individuals between MVR50, 000 (USD 3,242) and MVR150, 000 (USD 9,727). Appeals can only begin once fines have been paid, and fines must be paid within 30 days.



**24 JANUARY****JOURNALISTS FINED FOR “OBSTRUCTING THE DISCHARGING OF POLICE DUTIES” OVER 2015 BROADCAST**

Two *Raajje TV* journalists – Mohamed Wisam and Leevaan Ali Nasir, found guilty of obstructing police officers were fined MVR28,800 (US\$1,868) each. They are the first journalists to be sentenced in the Maldives in more than a decade. The criminal court said it was imposing a fine instead of the four-month jail term prosecutors requested because the pair were first-time offenders.

**27 FEBRUARY****CAMERAMAN FINED FOR “OBSTRUCTING POLICEMAN ON DUTY” DURING 2015 PROTEST**

Adam Zareer, cameraman for *Raajje TV*, was fined MVR3,000 (US\$195) for ‘obstructing policeman on duty’ while covering the opposition protest. A judge said the defence failed to challenge the eyewitness testimony of two police officers, which he deemed sufficient to prove guilt. Zareer was arrested during the station’s coverage of an opposition protest in March 2015.

**1 MARCH****POLICE DETAIN TWO JOURNALISTS UNDER GUISE OF “PROTECTIVE CUSTODY”**

The police took journalists Hassan Mohamed and Hassan Moosa of the *Maldives Independent* into “protective custody” in Faafu Atoll after ruling party supporters threatened them with assault. They were held overnight and released at 10 am on March 2. The police refused to let them contact their families or editors, and turned down a request by the *Maldives Independent* to speak to them. A police officer looked through their notes and photos before they were released.



**2 MARCH****RAAJJE TV REPORT DEATH THREATS TO MPS AHEAD OF VISIT FROM KING OF SAUDI ARABIA**

*Raajje TV* report death threats against its staff to the Maldives Police Service (MPS) after the station received phone calls threatening to kill journalists on the Faafu Atoll. The threat was received after the station dispatched a crew to Faafu Atoll ahead of a state visit to the Maldives by the King of Saudi Arabia

**18 MARCH****CRIMINAL COURT THREATEN LEGAL ACTION AGAINST JOURNALISTS FOR CRITICAL REMARKS**

The criminal court has threatened to take “legal action” against journalists who threaten the peace, stability and sovereignty of the Maldivian state. In a stern statement, the court accused some journalists of trying to “disrupt peace and stability”, “sow strife and discord among the public”, “create misgivings in the hearts of the people towards institutions and the heads of the Maldivian state”, “bring the three branches of the state into disrepute”, and “create divisions among the Maldivian people”.

**21 MARCH****POLICE SUMMON EDITOR OVER ARTICLES CRITICAL OF MALDIVIAN CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM**

The police have summoned and interrogated Ismail Naseer, the editor of *Mihaaru*, over two articles critical of the Maldives criminal justice system. Naseer was summoned after the criminal court and the Department of Judicial Administration filed complaints about two recent articles.



Journalists protest new criminal defamation laws



**26 MARCH****MAJORITY LEADER THREATENS JOURNALIST DURING TELEVISED PRESSER OVER CORRUPTION QUESTION**

Majority Leader Ahmed Nihan threatened a journalist during a televised press conference in response to a question about allegations linking ruling coalition lawmakers to the Maldives' biggest corruption scandal. Referring to the theft of nearly US\$80 million from the state-owned Maldives Marketing and Public Relations Corporation, *Raajje TV* journalist Azmoon Ahmed asked if there was any truth to claims that most pro-government lawmakers were awarded islands for resort development. Nihan said in response: "If that turns out [to] be a lie, I say as an answer: get ready to face the anti-defamation law."



Majority Leader Ahmed Nihan threatens journalist with defamation during live presser  
Credit Maldives Independent

**10 APRIL****OPPOSITION BROADCASTER FINED FOR ALLEGED DEFAMATION**

Maldives Broadcasting Commission (MBC) fined *Raajje TV* MVR 1 m (US\$ 64,850) for content that it deemed defamed President Abdulla Yameen. The material in question was a speech by a speaker at a rally held by Maldivian United Opposition on October 26, 2016, which the TV had broadcast live. A letter received by *Raajje TV* said they had violated clause ten subsections (a) (1) and (2) of the Anti-Defamation and Freedom of Expression Act, passed in August 2016. MBC said that the content created doubt over the roles and responsibility of the President and damaged his reputation and dignity.



**23 APRIL****SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVIST AND BLOGGER STABBED TO DEATH AT HOME**

Prominent blogger and social media activist, Yameen Rasheed, was found in the stairway of his apartment with multiple stab wounds to his chest, head and neck. He died shortly after arriving at the hospital due to excessive bleeding. Popularised for his satirical daily blog, *The Daily Panic*, Rasheed was an advocate for the rule of law, human rights and social justice; he was also an outspoken critic of the government and religious intolerance. Rasheed had received death threats for over a year, and expressed concern to friends and colleagues of the inaction by police in responding to his complaints.



Yameen Rasheed at the Find Moyameehaa rally in Aprilthat, Maldives

**11 JUNE****V NEWS EDITOR SUMMONED BY POLICE OVER HEADLINE**

*V news* senior editor Ahmed Rifau was summoned for questioning at the police headquarters over a headline about the arrest of a senior opposition figure. The police contended that the headline, 'Adam Azim arrested on charges of trying to topple the government,' misrepresented the content of the arrest warrant. Azim was accused of speaking in a manner that encouraged the illegal overthrow of the government and of undermining public trust and inciting hatred toward the judiciary.



**17 JUNE****MBC FINES MEDIANET FOR REBROADCASTING DOCUMENTARY ON GOVERNMENT CORRUPTION**

The MBC fined the *Medianet*, the country's main cable television provider, MVR500,000 (US\$32,425) for rebroadcasting an *Al Jazeera* corruption exposé in September. The 'Stealing Paradise' documentary, which exposed systemic corruption, abuse of power and criminal activity at the highest level of government, was deemed to pose a threat to national security. The MBC also ordered *Medianet* to issue a statement of apology, the Public Service Media reported.

**25 JULY****MBC FINES PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA OVER ALLEGED DEFAMATORY REMARKS**

The MBC slapped a fine of MVR200,000 (US\$12,970) on the state-owned Public Service Media over defamatory remarks made by a ruling party lawmaker at a televised press conference in April. Former Home Minister Umar Naseer filed the defamation complaint against MP Ibrahim Falah after the deputy leader of the ruling Progressive Party of Maldives accused him of awarding projects to paper companies for the July 2015 Independence Day celebrations. Naseer filed complaints with both the police and the MBC shortly after Falah's speech was televised live by the Television Maldives channel operated by PSM.

**26 JULY****JOURNALISTS MANHANDLED AND ARRESTED WHILE COVERING OPPOSITION RALLY**

A number of journalists – four from *Sangu TV* and three from *Raajje TV*, were arrested and other roughed up during an opposition rally held on the 52nd Independence Day. The detained journalists were Mohamed Wisam, Murshid Abdul Hakeem and videographer Ahmed Mamdhoo of *Raajje TV*, and Adam Janah, Ahmed Riffath, Mohamed Shanoon, and Abdullah Yamin of *Sangu TV*. Their treatment was argued on charges of "obstructing the duties of a law enforcement officer". They were later released.



Videographer Ahmed Mamdhoo of Raajje TV manhandled by police officer





Ahmed Rilwan Abdulla's mother pleads with police alongside Yameen Rasheed

## 12 SEPTEMBER

### UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS WARNS OF BIAS IN MALDIVIAN GOVERNMENT

In his opening statement at the UN Human Rights Council's 36th session, UN high commissioner for human rights Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussain said the Maldivian government was "increasingly cracking down on critical views".

## 3 OCTOBER

### MBC BANS LIVE-STREAMING IN PARLIAMENTARY CHAMBER

The Broadcasting Commission of Maldives warned TV stations against broadcasting footage live-streamed on social media by MPs who are inside the parliament chamber saying such videos contained "obscene language and content contrary to standards of public decency". The broadcasting commission said broadcasting the content was against the law. It advised broadcasters to "ensure that scenes like this are broadcasted in line with the Broadcasting Act, regulations under the Act, the Broadcasting Code of Practice, and the Anti-Defamation and Freedom of Expression Act". Legal action will be taken against those who violate broadcasting laws, the commission warned.



**8 OCTOBER****RAAJJE TV RECEIVES THIRD DEFAMATION FINE**

Maldives Broadcasting Commission (MBC) fined *Raajje TV* MVR500,000 for airing the comments made by MP Mohamed Musthafa on *Raajje TV* on 28 July, calling them a “threat to national security”. MP Mohamed Musthafa was not fined for defamation. The fine coincides with the anniversary of an arson attack on the station in 2013.

**23 OCTOBER****FURTHER MEDIA RESTRICTIONS TABLED IN THE ‘MALDIVES MEDIA COMMISSION’ BILL**

A ruling party lawmaker Jafar Dawood has proposed legislation for the creation of a new media regulatory body after dissolving the broadcasting commission and media council. The introduction of the ‘Maldives Media Commission’ bill has been tabled. The proposed regulator can impose hefty fines and temporarily shut down newspapers and TV stations. After investigating breaches of a new code of ethics, the Maldives Media Commission can order print and online outlets to make corrections, issue warnings, and impose fines of up to MVR100,000 (US\$6,485) for repeated violations. If written or broadcast content is deemed to pose a danger to Islam, national security, public order or public health, the commission can ask the police to stop publication or broadcast. The commission can also seek court judgments to cancel the registration or broadcasting license of newspapers and TV stations.