



An open letter by MDP President

One can only guess the motivation behind Seema Sengupta's recently penned op-ed on the Maldives, published in Arab News Pakistan, which is so biased, bizarre and misguided it makes you wonder if you are living in a parallel universe.

President Solih won a landslide vote in late 2018, after the Maldivian people threw out the corrupt autocrat, Abdulla Yameen, who was universally lambasted by international human rights groups and Western democracies for his endless assault on democratic institutions, as well as being embroiled in countless corruption scandals and a plot to launder \$1 billion of dirty money through the nation's central bank.

President Yameen also sold Maldivian sovereignty to the Chinese Communist Party: awarding 12 of our islands to Chinese state run entities, and wracking up so much debt as to leave us unable to repay the bills. This undermined Maldivian independence, and threatened Indian Ocean stability.

A year after voting in President Solih, the Maldivian people awarded the ruling Maldivian Democratic Party another landslide, in parliamentary elections.

Since Solih came to power, all political prisoners have been freed, the rotten judiciary has been reformed, and the Maldives has shed its image of an international pariah and human rights violator, and rejoined the Commonwealth of Nations.

But all this democratic progress is lost on Sengupta, who in her op-ed relies entirely on voices from the Yameen era, including Ghassan Maumoon, a former President's Office official who Al Jazeera uncovered, in the documentary Stealing Paradise, as part of the plot to launder the \$1 billion of dirty money — and who voiced no protest when Yameen unjustly jailed Ghassan's own father, former president Maumoon Gayoom.

Also cited in the opinion piece is my former Vice President, Waheed, who attained the presidency via a police and military coup, supported by Islamic extremists. When Waheed finally permitted a national election after grabbing power, he garnered 4% of the vote — a Guinness World Record for the worst election performance of any head of government, in any national election, ever.

If Sengupta would care to visit the Maldives, rather than opining from afar, she will discover a very different country from the one she characterises: for a start, she will receive no harassment from immigration (Yameen effectively banned all foreign reporters). Moreover, she can speak with whom she wants (in the year since Solih came to power, the Maldives

jumped 22 places in the Reporter's Without Border's press freedom index), and she is also free to write what she wants (the Solih government respects the Constitution, and the fundamental freedoms enshrined within it).



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