

# REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES

*Capital:* Malé

*Population:* 143,469 (1978)

**HISTORY.** The islands were under British protection from 1887 to mid-1965. They now enjoy complete independence under the agreement signed in Colombo on 26 July 1965. Maldives became a republic on 11 Nov. 1968.

**AREA AND POPULATION.** The Republic of Maldives, 400 miles to the south-west of Sri Lanka, consists of some 2,000 low-lying coral islands (only 220 inhabited), grouped into 12 clearly defined clusters of atolls but divided into 19 for administrative purposes. Area 115 sq. miles (298 sq. km). Population (census 1971), 118,818. Estimate (1978) 143,469. Capital Malé (29,555 inhabitants).

**CONSTITUTION AND GOVERNMENT.** The President is elected every 5 years by universal adult suffrage. He is assisted by the Ministers' *Majlis*, a cabinet of ministers of his own choice whom he may dismiss at will. There is also a Citizens' *Majlis* (House of Representatives) which consists of 48 members, 8 nominated by the President, 2 elected from Malé and 2 elected from each of the 19 atolls. The life of the Citizens' *Majlis* is 5 years.

*President and Prime Minister:* Maumoon Abdul Gayoom.

The people are Moslems, and Islam is reflected in the constitution and judicial system.

The official language is Divehi, which is akin to Elu or old Sinhalese.

*National flag:* Red with a green panel bearing a white crescent.

**ECONOMY.** The islands are covered with coconut palms and yield millet and fruit as well as coconut produce.

The Maldivian economy is based on the fishing industry. Bonito ('Maldivian fish') is the main export commodity and Japan the main buyer. Tourism, introduced in 1972, is expanding and there were 15,000 visitors in 1976. There is no direct taxation. Exports to UK (1978), £30,000; imports, £292,000.

## COMMUNICATIONS

**Aviation.** The 1965 agreement which allowed the British Government staging and communications facilities on Gan island and part of Hittadu island in Addu atoll, the southernmost of the group, was terminated in 1976, when the RAF staging post on Gan closed down. There is another civil airstrip at Hulule in the Malé atoll, some 300 miles from Gan, which is being extended.

**Shipping.** The merchant fleet consists of about 50 vessels of 200,000 GRT.

**Post.** In Jan. 1977 there were 480 telephones.

## DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATIVES

OF GREAT BRITAIN IN THE REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES

*Ambassador:* D. P. Aiers, CMG (resides in Colombo).

OF THE REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES TO THE UNITED NATIONS

*Ambassador:* Mohamed Musthafa Hussain.

## Book of Reference

Bell, H. C. P., *History, Archaeology and Epigraphy of the Maldivian Islands*. Ceylon Govt. Press, Colombo, 1940