

Supporting a young democracy

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has been a Member of Parliament for over thirty years. He worked initially as an underwriter and consultant before being first elected in 1983 for Basildon. He served as a Parliamentary Private Secretary for ten years and had a great deal of legislative success sponsoring numerous bills through Parliament. He served on various committees and all All-Party Groups notably the Health Select Committee. He was knighted in the 2015 New Year's Honours for political and public service.

The Maldives consists of nearly 1,200 Islands, of which only 192 are inhabited. It is a wonder as you fly over the Islands nestling in the deep blue waters.

The outcome of the Copenhagen Conference in 2008 was disappointing as far as climate change campaigners were concerned, with little significant action being agreed upon by the international community.

President Abdullah Yameen Abdul Gayoom has continued to raise awareness of the risks posed to the Maldives as a consequence of climate change.

With a shortage of drinking water, the Maldivian people are at risk of losing access to fresh water, essential for sustaining life – that much is obvious.

There is speculation the country could disappear by 2100 if the threat from rising sea levels is not addressed, however, the situation on the ground would suggest that climate change is threatening life on the ocean archipelago now.

By investing in green energy and renewables, the Maldives may be able to move against the rising tide and mitigate against the worst effects that rising sea levels will have, and are having, on the country's people.

President Yameen is right to prioritise a five-year long initiative to build solar farms, slash emissions and invest in flood-proofing waste systems to protect and preserve the country's future. However, it would be ill-advised to do so through government subsidies, rather, businesses should be incentivised to invest in green technologies.

As a real-life case study of how climate change is likely to affect the world, there is much that the Maldives can do to push this issue up the international community's agenda; which, in turn, will help circumvent the impacts of climate change.

The Maldives must not only be encouraged but also given the opportunity to mould itself over time into a functioning democratic country of the people, by the people, for the people.

Fostering a democratic nation in the Maldives has not been easy. Francis Fukuyama said of contemporary liberal democracies that "...they were deliberately created by human beings at a definite point in time." He argued that often the desire of peoples to establish democracy was a call to throw off "...the mistakes and injustices of the preceding political order."

Transitioning from one democratically elected

president can be challenging – Iraq, Afghanistan and Egypt are examples of this. By installing democratic institutions, you are merely setting the foundations on which they can be built upon. Parliamentary democracy here in the UK was established over hundreds of years – indeed, the cliché "Rome was not built in a day" springs to mind. The Maldives must not only be encouraged but also given the opportunity to mould itself over time into a functioning democratic country of the people, by the people, for the people.

President Yameen should be commended for the efforts that he and his government have made in extending a hand to countries such as China to negotiate bilateral trade deals, further enhancing the Maldivian economy.

But here in Britain we must do more to invest in the island nation, where trade in green technology would be advantageous for both our countries. I personally have encouraged UK Trade & Investment (UKTI) to get much more involved, as it has done in countries such as Sri Lanka.

In some ways we have seen President Yameen shift, rightly or wrongly, the main focus of his government away from climate change and towards a drive for economic prosperity.

There are a number of exciting opportunities and infrastructure developments taking place in the Maldives, and Yameen's legacy may be determined by the extent to which he is successful in improving the social mobility of the Maldivian people.

The fact that the Maldives has been recognised as a Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Plus country should be applauded, as the lives of many in the Maldives have generally improved since democracy was first established in the country, in 2008.

Any visitor will see that the capital Malé is vastly overcrowded. The reclaimed island at Hulhumalé is developing rapidly, with its schools and hospital, and is an exciting prospect, just as the other island named the Global Green City, at Gulhi Falhu is beginning to take shape. The I-Heaven project is another addition to the growing list of developments taking place across the country.

The Maldives is a wonder to behold for any tourist. It is truly paradise. The challenge for the Maldivian government is to ensure that its citizens enjoy the prosperity that its increasing attraction as a tourist destination will bring.