



Ministry of Education

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**UNOFFICIAL TRANSLATION OF THE INFORMATION GIVEN TO
HONOURABLE MPs OF THE PEOPLE’S MAJLIS**

1. Synopsis

This case is based on the allegation that I have caused Islam and Dhivehi to be divorced from the education provided to Maldivian children, and that the opportunity for children to acquire the skills and knowledge to understand and appreciate the literature and culture of our country has been denied. This is an untrue allegation, based on personal opinion, and made without adequate research into the truth of the matter.

From the time that I took over the responsibility for the Ministry of Education, I have endeavoured to make religious practices as well as Dhivehi language and literature priorities of focus in schools. Some of the measures taken in this regard are summarised below:

- Previously, Islam and Qur’an were taught as one subject; this practice was changed, with the decision to teach them as separate subjects of study.
- Offering innumerable opportunities for professional learning for Islam and Qur’an teachers.
- Communicating with schools, both verbally and via formal circulars (see attached), regarding strengthening student discipline and religious education.
- Seeking and obtaining assistance from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs to establish prayer rooms in schools, after a personal meeting with the Minister of Islamic Affairs and his deputy.
- Utilising the funds received from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs to establish prayer rooms in schools.
- Encouraging schools to devote prayer time for prayers have lead schools to increasingly practise this.
- Establishing Dhivehi literary and cultural clubs in schools and encouraging schools to increase activities by these clubs.
- Introduction of the concept of holistic education to the sector; paying special attention to the development of a generation who are accustomed to and value religious, literary, cultural and vocational skills and practices.

2. The Seven Identified Issues

- 2.1 “The sudden transfer of students against their will and that of their parents, from Ma’uhadh at Kulliyathul Dhiraasathul Islamiyya in 2009, where they had been undergoing studies in a resource-rich, conducive environment under the guidance of capable teachers, to the old premises of Al Madhrasathul Arabiyathul Islamiyya where there were no resources.”**

Students were transferred from Kulliyathul Dhiraasathul Islamiyya to Al Madhrasathul Arabiyathul Islamiyya as Kulliyathul Dhiraasathul Islamiyya was to be part of the soon to be established university, in accordance with government policy. The decision to transfer students was taken after consultation with parents, and was followed up with efforts to make the required changes to the resources available at Al Madhrasathul Arabiyathul Islamiyya. I have addressed this issue at parliament at a previous occasion.

- 2.2 “Continually advising the President to establish Kulliyathul Dhiraasathul Islamiyya as a faculty of the Maldives College of Higher Education, destroying the prospect of establishing an Islamic University and thereby constricting its mandate to expand Islamic education and strengthen religious beliefs in the Maldivian society.”**

The decision to establish Kulliyathul Dhiraasathul Islamiyya as a faculty of the Maldives College of Higher Education was one of the pledges of the MDP manifesto, that was to be implemented within 1 – 3 years (see page 89 of the Manifesto). That, thereby, was government policy. As a Minister of the Cabinet, it is my duty to implement government policy. The change that took place at Kulliyathul Dhiraasathul Islamiyya was carried out without affecting the students or the courses of study in any way.

- 2.3 “Supporting the decision by Male Municipality to obstruct the long awaited plans of Kulliyathul Dhiraasathul Islamiyya to construct a new building at a site that was acquired specifically for that purpose, and to establish a public park at the site instead; lack of assistance to Kulliyathul Dhiraasathul Islamiyya in this regard, at a time when work on the new site was ready to begin.”**

I have previously raised the issue with the President, regarding the government’s decision to claim back the land adjacent to Kulliyathul Dhiraasathul Islamiyya, which had been allocated to the institution. However, the government has the right to utilise state owned land in any way it sees fit. As such, other sites previously allocated for the use of the Ministry of Education have been also been claimed back; just as some schools have gained additional land space.

- 2.4 “The Minister’s decision to ignore the plight of the students of Al Madhrasathul Arabiyathul Islamiyya even when it became dangerous and impossible for the school to function in its old, crumbling premises; disallowing the school to be housed within the premises of Kulliyathul Dhiraasathul Islamiyya where space was available.”**

When the students of Al Madhrasathul Arabiyathul Islamiyya had to abandon the school premises I acted in the best regard of the students. My intention was to move ahead in a way that would not negatively impact the education of the students. The decision to transfer students of that school elsewhere was taken after wide consultations with the school board and its parents, and with their full approval. Both the school board and the parents of the school appreciated the way in which this case was dealt with, and are aware that the measures taken are of a temporary nature. As soon as the school premises are renovated, the school will begin functioning there once again.

2.5 “The Minister has not clarified his position regarding the differences of opinion expressed via the media between the senior management at the Ministry of Education and the senior management at Al Madhrasathul Arabiyathul Islamiyya, regarding the issue of constructing a new building for the school. When MPs for Fares Maathoda and Maavah met with the Minister of Education on the 9th of May 2010, with regard to the news being circulated among the public that the students of Al Madhrasathul Arabiyathul Islamiyya will be dispersed between different schools in 2011, the Minister had admitted that it was something that he had previously stated. It must be noted that while the future of the education of the students of Al Madhrasathul Arabiyathul Islamiyya is in question, no plans or policies regarding the refurbishment of the school have been made public by the Ministry as of yet either.”

Two options have been discussed with regard to the future of Al Madhrasathul Arabiyathul Islamiyya. One is to construct a new school at a different site. Second is to reconstruct the old building at the present site. No announcements regarding the future have been made because time was required to make a decision between the two options; the lack of funds in the existing budget for either of these options hindered the process and made it impossible to set a timeline. When Honourable MPs Abdul Azeez Jamaal Aboobakur and Ibrahim Muthalib met with me, I noted that I required about a month to make that decision. It has only just been a month since that meeting with the two said MPs.

The issue of distributing the students of Al Madhrasathul Arabiyyathul Islamiyya among the other schools has never arisen. It was only discussed with a meeting with the school board in trying to arrive at a decision regarding temporary measures that could be taken to continue with the schooling of the students involved. When the Mudheer of the school stated that the primary classes were taught in the English medium, and the only difference was that the students were also taught Arabic, I made the suggestion that one possibility could be housing the students among the other primary schools temporarily, while ensuring that they receive the Arabic lessons that they require. This was what I had explained to the two Honourable MPs when they met with me last May. I did not make an admission that I had decided to distribute the students among the schools.

As indicated to the two Honourable MPs in my meeting with them, we have been able to find a solution to the issue within the time period of one month I had set for myself. The old building will be demolished within the next few days and preparations for a new block at that site will be made, Insha Allah.

2.6 “The decision to make Islam and Dhivehi language optional subjects at higher secondary level, rather than compulsory subjects as they are now, in stark contrast to the proposals of the participants of the National Curriculum Symposium.”

This draft Curriculum framework was drawn up after widespread consultations with varying stakeholder groups over a long period of time. These include:

1. A nationwide survey, using a written questionnaire, on public views regarding curricular reforms. Completed questionnaires were received from 5553 individuals.
2. Preliminary discussions on curricular reforms with 200 school leaders in 2008.
3. A series of focus group meetings, attended by a total of 201 individuals from various stakeholder groups, prior to the National Curriculum Symposium.
4. A National Curriculum Symposium, attended by 196 registered participants, where papers on 8 different themes were presented and discussed.
5. A series of focus group meetings, held after the symposium, attended by a total of 219 individuals, where the draft framework was presented and discussed.
6. Curriculum reform issues discussed, and materials relating to the draft framework shared on the public blog stated below, and opened for discussion: (<http://nationalcurriculumreform.blogspot.com>).

Formulation of the National Curriculum Framework

The draft framework was drawn up based on the views received from the various consultations identified above, as well as educational philosophy, national policy and international best practice. The curriculum reform work is carried out by a team of professionals, under the guidance of a steering committee nominated for this task. The professional team involved in drafting the documents also seek comments from international experts.

A National Curriculum is a key instrument necessary to succeed in achieving the vision of a nation. The National Curriculum Framework is the foundation which determines not only the structure of schooling, but also how learning will be organised across the stages. It determines the learning areas and serves as a basis for the development of subject syllabi and learning outcomes. For this reason, widespread consultations on the draft framework have been seen to be an essential part of the curriculum reform process. The Educational Development Centre is therefore continuing to consult stakeholders and engage in discussions on the draft document. The National Curriculum is a document that encompasses public views; it is not something that can be drawn up based on my personal views. I have no doubt that the document will reflect the positions of the majority of stakeholders as well as experts in the field, when it is formalised.

2.7 “Following the government’s decision to dissolve the National Centre for Linguistic and Historical Research, and to re-establish the work of the Centre within the Maldives College of Higher Education, the lack of support from the Minister for the initiative to establish the National Centre for Linguistic

and Historical Research as one of the institutions of the College; but to insist on allocating it the status of a small unit within a department of the Faculty of Arts.”

The National Centre for Linguistic and Historical Research functions under the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture. The task of allocating part of the mandate of the Centre, to the Maldives College of Higher Education was overseen by a committee comprising of representatives from the National Centre for Linguistic and Historical Research, the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, as well as the Department of Higher Education of the Ministry of Education.

The Ministry of Education is not part of the decision making process in establishing centres, departments, faculties or institutes within the Maldives College of Higher Education. The decisions are made by the College Council.

3. Conclusion

In accordance with the concept of holistic development, I have been striving to create schools with a learning environment that will develop a generation of learners who are spiritual, disciplined, thinking, healthy, knowledgeable, skilful and able to successfully fit into a globalised society.

I contend that the issues raised against me relating to my work were done so without having delved fully into the nature of the issues. I also believe that the work I am carrying out in implementing government policies falls within the parameters of the nation’s constitution and Islam.

Thus, I trust that Honourable Members of Parliament will reflect on these issues in making an informed and just decision.

23 June 2010

Mustafa Lutfi
Minister of Education