

An Extraordinary Man

Maizan Hassan Maniku (1953-2002)

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Maizan Hassan Maniku was born in Malé on 24 April 1953. He died in Perth, Western Australia while on a visit to attend his daughter's high school graduation on 13 July 2002. He was just 49.

Hassan Maniku was a man of many talents, but he is most widely remembered for his profound contributions to the development of fisheries in the Maldives. Hassan joined the then Ministry of Fisheries in 1979, as a Fisheries Development Officer. He was almost immediately made responsible for procurement, project execution and management of a major World Bank Fisheries Project (1979-82). It is a reminder of the acute lack of trained personnel in the Maldives at that time that such a responsible and onerous job was given to someone so relatively young and inexperienced. Hassan clearly rose to the task, as recalled by Hon. Abdul Sattar Moosa Didi (Minister of Fisheries at that time) in his accompanying tribute. Hassan was made Head of a new Planning and Development Unit within the Ministry of Fisheries in 1981, taking on among other things a feasibility assessment for the development of the Alifushi boatyard in Raa Atoll. From 1982-86 he was Assistant Project Coordinator for another major fisheries development initiative, the Fish Wealth Exploitation Project funded by the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development. From 1984 he was a member of the influential national Fisheries Advisory Board. He was also subsequently involved, in more advisory roles, in both the Second and Third World Bank Fisheries Projects.

In 1984 Hassan achieved what may prove to be his most lasting memorial, with the formation of the Marine Research Section (Marine Research Centre from 1998). The dream of a national centre for fisheries and marine research was his, as was the planning and preparation needed to make that dream a reality. What is so remarkable in retrospect is that Hassan was only 31 at the time. He was already an unusually well respected and influential figure, with an aura of great maturity. This was based on his hard work, real talent, genuine knowledge and understanding of the fisheries, and on his

natural ability to inspire others. It was also aided perhaps by his striking appearance: his scholarly goatee beard, his shock of prematurely grey hair and by his calmly authoritative manner.

Hassan was Director of MRS from its very beginning (24 July 1984) right up until his early retirement on 1 June 1999. He had completed 20 years of government service in February 1999 and left, with the rank of Director General of Fisheries Research and Development, in order to work on his many other interests. From the start, Hassan envisaged MRS carrying out research on the fisheries resources of the Maldives, with the aim of promoting rational management and sustainable utilization. Hassan soon expanded this mandate to include all living marine resources, including coral reefs. He gave life to his dream by attracting substantial foreign funding and initiating major research programs on a wide range of pressing issues. These included research programs on: the tuna fishery (including two tagging programs, the first of their kind in the tropical Indian Ocean); the tuna livebait fishery; an exploratory offshore fishing survey; a reef fish resources survey; a study of the effects of environmental degradation on reef fisheries; rehabilitation of degraded reefs using artificial reef blocks; coral reef monitoring; a crown-of-thorns starfish program; and much more besides.

These research programs laid a foundation of understanding of Maldivian marine resources. Building on this during the latter part of his time at MRS, Hassan was increasingly concerned with issues of resource sustainability and management. He developed the concept of Integrated Reef Resources Management (IRRM), recognizing the importance of involving all resource users in the management process. He worked directly with local fishing communities in the central atolls to hone practical solutions to real problems. He was also always concerned with the welfare of fishing communities, supporting both the Maldives Fishermen's Association and the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers. In March 1996 Hassan organized and hosted an IRRM workshop in Malé. It was a measure of his stature internationally that he was able to attract some of the very biggest names in the field to the workshop.

Hassan placed great emphasis not only on actual research, but also on disseminating the results of that research. He played a key role in establishing the annual fisheries journal *Rasain* in 1981. He started the short-lived *Rasain Newsletter* in 1988. Although only two volumes were produced, they were very much a precursor to the authoritative *Maldives*

Marine Research Bulletin, which Hassan launched in 1995. The inaugural volume of that now well-established series summarized research activities carried out by MRS during its first ten years, 1984-94, all of it under Hassan's direction. As noted in the preface by Hon. Hassan Sobir, then Minister of Fisheries and Agriculture, this made for "impressive reading, for much has been achieved. This achievement is a tribute to Maizan Hassan Maniku, whose vision was the key factor in the formation and development of MRS".

Hassan's pioneering role in fisheries development and marine research sometimes brought controversy. But it also brought him three prestigious and richly deserved national awards. In 1990 he received a Presidential Award for his contributions to the development of fisheries in the Maldives, under the 25th Anniversary of Independence Award Scheme. In 1994 he received a Presidential Award for his outstanding contribution to the establishment of marine research in the Maldives. A photo of Hassan receiving this award on Fishermen's Day, 10 December 1994, appears in *Rasain* (volume 15, page 16). In November 2002 Hassan was posthumously awarded an Honorary Public Service Award for his exceptional services to the fisheries sector.

While a brief outline such as this may hint at Hassan's achievements, it does not do justice to the man. Because Hassan affected lives not just by what he did, but by how he did it. Hassan had human warmth, he had style, he had lightness of touch. He had extraordinary vision. It was his vision that created and then nurtured MRS. His vision launched the uniquely Maldivian Fisheries Science GCE O'Level syllabus and exam. His vision shaped my career, and many others, even if we did not always recognize it at the time. He also had integrity, a ready smile and great charm. The numerous research projects that set MRS abuzz under Hassan's directorship were for the most part funded by overseas donors. That so many projects were funded, often in very substantial amounts, was in no small part due to that charm. To see him in action with a potential donor was an education in itself. But Hassan also delivered. He built up a team of young local scientists and forged links with established overseas institutions, inspiring all in the process. For another quality that Hassan enjoyed was his leadership; he gave us the freedom to soar, and for that we loved him.

But perhaps the most fundamental of Hassan's qualities was his respect for his fellow man. The many tributes printed below are witness to this. They come from fisheries colleagues of all ranks. Hassan was just as comfortable

with local fishermen as he was in the company of senior international figures. He nurtured talent and interest wherever he found it, making no distinction between young or old, male or female, local or foreigner. Hassan gave respect and received it in return.

Hassan was particularly well respected overseas, and was in demand as a speaker and participant in workshops and conferences. Over the years he attended some 70 overseas meetings in at least 18 different countries. Such meetings were a vital a chance to catch up with old friends and new ideas, and to build new contacts to further fisheries development and marine research in the Maldives. I attended one of these meetings with Hassan in Colombo in January 1991. At one point the discussion was stalled and strained, as representatives from different countries pressed their own agendas. Hassan had been keeping quite, until the Chair called on him for some input. With a boyish smile and a self-deprecating remark he raised a laugh from all present, then lifted the discussion back on track. It was a remarkable display of apparently effortless charm, diplomacy and purpose.

Despite all these extraordinary attributes Hassan was of course not perfect. His numerous preoccupations inevitably meant that there were occasions when he simply did not have the time to do all that needed to be done. And while his style of leadership let many fly, it also left some floundering. But Hassan's qualities were such that blatant hagiography would be a disservice to his memory, and he would not have appreciated hypocrisy.

Although I knew him mainly in his fisheries role (and successful directorship of the national centre for marine research would have been enough responsibility for anyone else) Hassan was much more than even this. The breadth of his interests and his knowledge was extraordinary. He was the quintessential Maldivian Renaissance Man. He was an award-winning photographer, an artist, architect, music producer, resort owner and tourism developer, and on occasion a mean cook.

His beautiful designs and illustrations (together with those of his friend and close collaborator Ahmed Abbas) grace the present Maldivian bank notes. He designed the distinctive covers of the fisheries journals *Rasain* and *Rasain Newsletter*. The classic logo used for Fishermen's Day every year since 1981 is his. He designed and built his own house in Malé: a gracious and airy residence quite unlike the majority of multi-storey buildings now going up. He (again with Ahmed Abbas) took on one of the very last traditional houses in Malé and sympathetically converted it to a modern

studio and gallery, showcasing works by local artists, photographers and craftsmen.

Hassan also had a passionate interest in boat building. During his time in the Ministry of Fisheries he was closely associated with the development of the Alifushi boatyard and of its very successful 'second generation dhoni'. He was also involved with the development of teaching boat building at the Alifushi Rural Youth Vocational Training Centre and the design and operation of the Ministry of Fisheries' 'long-range vessel' *Miyawali*. The latter was not a great success, being perhaps too far ahead of its time, but with hindsight it can be seen as a forerunner of today's mega-dhonis. Hassan was particularly concerned to document and preserve traditional boat building knowledge, and developed close personal links with a regional centre of excellence, the Western Australian Maritime Museum in Fremantle. He had plans to build a traditional sailing *batteli* and sail her to Bengal along the route followed by old Maldivian traders. He had taken two years sabbatical leave starting in June 1996 to work on this and other projects, but his first heart attack later that year cut short that particular adventure.

Maizan Hassan Maniku was educated at Majeediyya School in Malé. After finishing school in 1972 he worked for seven months as a temporary English Clerk and Secretary for various government offices in Malé. Soon afterwards he entered the American University of Beirut. This was just before the start of the long-running troubles there, which interrupted Hassan's studies. The University was closed for a time, during which Hassan returned to Malé but also travelled widely in the Middle East and Afghanistan. When he did return to Beirut he worked as a research assistant, studying decapod crustaceans of the eastern Mediterranean. He finally graduated with a B.Sc. in Biology and Marine Zoology in 1977. He then stayed on to complete a Diploma in Education (Teaching Sciences in Secondary Schools). Over the same period he picked up his architectural skills, sharing accommodation with an architecture student for whom he regularly completed assignments. In 1977 he returned to Majeediyya School as a Teacher of Biology and Science, and also, typically, Fine Arts. He taught until 1979 when he joined the Ministry of Fisheries.

I know that all those who were fortunate to have known Hassan and count him as a friend will join me in extending heartfelt condolences to his wife Mariyam, to his children Zein, Zayam and Zaya, and to all his family.

Maizan Hassan Maniku was an extraordinary man. He is sorely missed.

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