

## **Unseen & Unheard: Presenting Maldives' India Out movement, Unfiltered version**

For most of us, the voice of resistance for India within Maldives, emerged as President Ibrahim Solih won the 2018 presidential elections. Within the last four years, there has been numerous reports and attempts at understanding the entire foundation and purpose behind the 'India Out.' For anyone, the answer might be same that:

- It is a resistance by the people of Maldives to safeguard their sovereignty.
- A way to hold the government questionable for their strong inclination towards 'India First Policy.'
- And a struggle to resist the influence India exerts in Maldives' internal affairs.

By the end of reading this report you will start questioning these understandings, as we try to present to you the misconceptions being aired by some external agents.

### **Tracing the roots:**

With the crackdown on democracy, the cordial relationship shared between Maldives and India severed as Abdulla Yameen rose to power in 2013. Even though the campaign was officially launched in 2020, the anti-rhetoric sentiments existed even before that. Deep analysis shows that 'India Out' in Maldives existed since the time of ex President Mohamed Nasheed (2012, 13). The findings also hinted that a group which had largely contributed in overthrowing Nasheed, is also the same group that is leading this propaganda campaign.

### **#WakeUpNow**

Before we understand anti Govt sentiments or #IndiaOut, we must learn what #WakeUpNow is all about. A twitter ID named WakeUpNow was first created in 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2013. They also have a fb community. The entity identifies itself as a youth movement that had an instrumental role in stopping ex President Mohamed Nasheed's bid for re-elections in 2013.

Maldives was chaotic in its transitioning stage from 'dictatorship to democracy' in 2008. The people were still susceptible to changes, Nasheed may have come out too strong as a liberal for a nation who was very much hardlined to extreme religious beliefs. The coup that followed in 2012, dethroning Nasheed was basically the work of people who benefited by portraying Nasheed as anti-Islamic. This narrative that was being build around the MDP leader, also contributed largely to him not winning the 2013 elections. It is without a say that there were also other reasons that caused him his defeat. The continuous attack to his candidacy for re-elections, paraded the social space under the #WakeUpNow movement.

This so called 'woke' movement was started by Ihsan A. Naseer, who also goes on to share that Yameen had approached him to become his political appointee. Yameen was impressed seeing the tremendous job Ihsan and his boys, which includes Ahmed Azaan, co-founder of dhiyares, were doing in terms of d-popularizing Nasheed.



**Ahmed Azaan** ✓  
@axanner



#WakeUpNOW is with Yameen to win this election. But this alliance does not mean that we will be supporting him... [fb.me/KYOIXli9](https://fb.me/KYOIXli9)

1:37 AM · Sep 8, 2013 · Facebook

1 Retweet



**Wake Up NOW** @WakeUp\_MV · Sep 8, 2013



A very heartfelt congratulations to Yameen. May Allah bless Yameen to be our future leader, to upload Islam, our... [fb.me/2yM7UZtrM](https://fb.me/2yM7UZtrM)



**Image:** Screenshots showing that WakeUpNow and Ahmed Azaan formed an alliance with Yameen for his elections in 2014. Its not understood how forming an alliance and not supporting, goes hand in hand together.

It was also observed that around 10-15 people managed the twitter ID. Below, shows a sample of tweets posted by the individuals with their initials mentioned.



**Wake Up NOW**  
@WakeUp\_MV

...

Nasheed never used the name " Allah " within his short three years of presidency. what a shame!

- MN

[#WakeUpNOW](#) [fb.me/2JKSxP7pK](https://fb.me/2JKSxP7pK)

7:56 AM · Aug 23, 2013 · Facebook



**Wake Up NOW**  
@WakeUp\_MV

...

Nasheed failed to create any new jobs opportunities to cater for the rising job demands![#WakeUpNOW](#)

-AA- [fb.me/1VLjFqLjH](https://fb.me/1VLjFqLjH)

2:08 AM · Aug 25, 2013 · Facebook



**Wake Up NOW**  
@WakeUp\_MV

...

When we elected a new government in 2008 did we ask for all these cases of corruption? [#WakeUpNOW](#)

— Azan

11:36 PM · Sep 28, 2013 · Facebook

2 Retweets 1 Like



**Wake Up NOW** @WakeUp\_MV · Aug 23, 2013

...

It is not up to Nasheed to decide if we are to implement the law of Allah. Nasheed has challenged Quran like... [fb.me/2tGxPmfV](https://fb.me/2tGxPmfV)



**Wake Up NOW**  
@WakeUp\_MV

...

Islam is the only element which unites everyone in this country.

— Ihsan [#WakeUpNOW](#)

11:40 PM · Sep 28, 2013 · Facebook

8 Retweets 1 Like

## 2013 Election Campaign by WakeUpNow team:

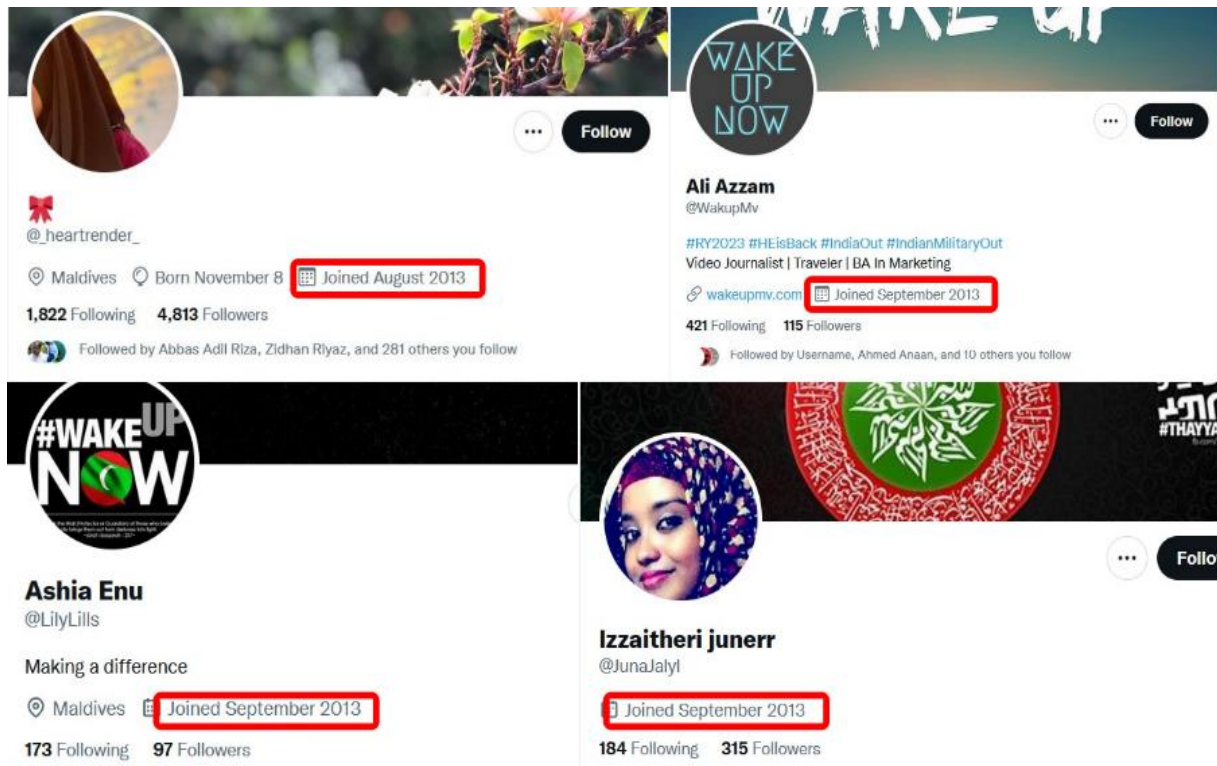
The 2013 elections was one of the most sought after elections. It was scheduled, annulled and contested three times on three different days, respectively 7<sup>th</sup> Sept, 9<sup>th</sup> Nov and 16<sup>th</sup> Nov.

It was observed that prior to the day set for contesting the elections, near about 10 IDs would spam tweets all day along. This was repetitive on all three days. Most of their tweets would be copy paste. The tweets can be previewed as follows:

The image displays a grid of ten tweets, arranged in two columns and five rows. Each tweet is a copy-paste of a specific message. The left column contains tweets with the text: "@MohamedNasheed gave high government jobs to Christian missionaries and others with anti-Islamic views #WakeUpNow". The right column contains tweets with the text: "@MohamedNasheed made great friendship with David Hardingham , a Christian fundamentalist who continuously hurt Islamic sentiments." The dates of the tweets are highlighted in red boxes: Oct 8, 2013 (twice), Nov 15, 2013 (four times), and Nov 8, 2013 (once). The users mentioned in the tweets include Ahmed Azaan (@axanner), Chaalumalakah, Izzaitheri junerr, Ashia Enu, and Aishath Saja.

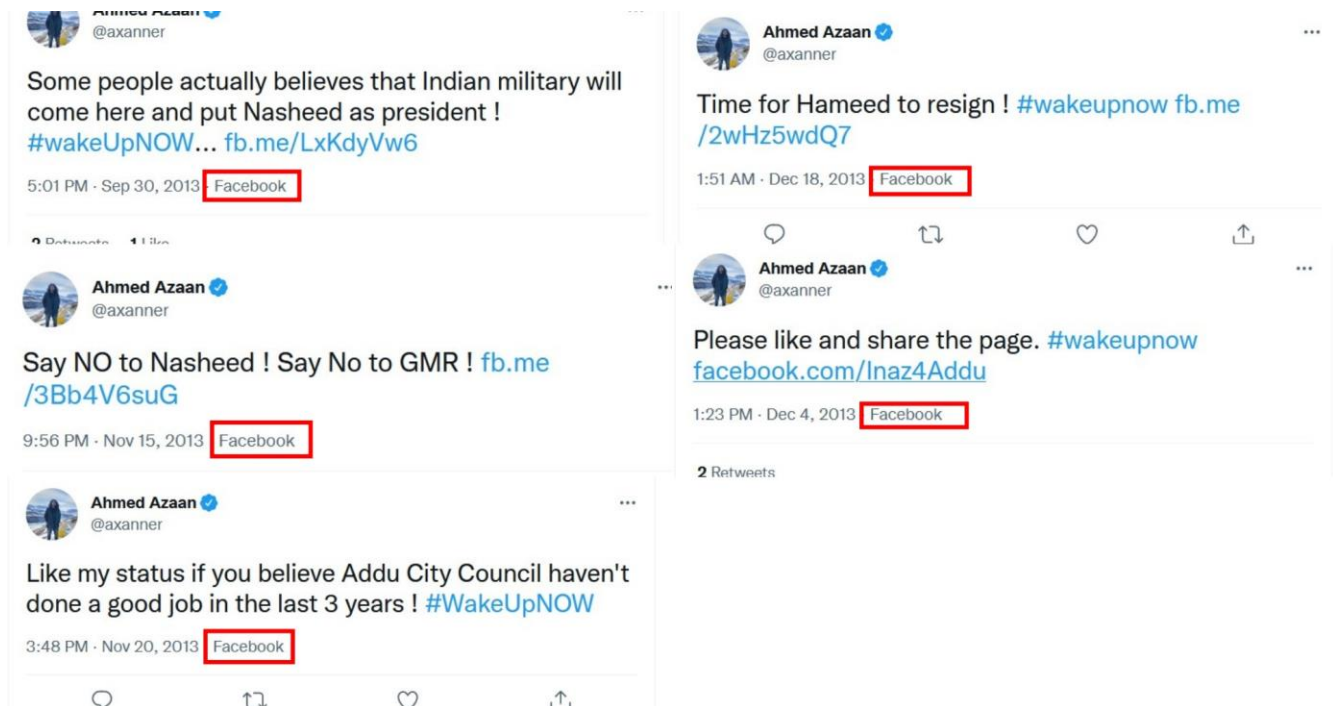
According to the tweet sample, it can be seen that mostly same IDs would take part in it. With one sending out the first tweet, in this case Ahmed Azaan posting the content simultaneously in Oct and Nov 2013, close to elections. This would then be picked by these IDs who would try to create a buzz.

Also, upon researching the IDs, it was found that most of them happened to be bots, perhaps being monitored by one person or more. Many of these IDs creation date also happens to be around Aug-Sept 2013.



**Image:** Bot IDs created for campaign purpose in 2013

Below tweet samples of Azaan and WakeUpNow twitter account shows activities of how texts were automated by assigning bots to it.





A vote for Nasheed is a vote for corruption, cronyism and nepotism. His 3 year record speaks for itself !  
[#WakeUpNOW](#)

:53 AM · Aug 29, 2013 [Facebook](#)



We are the youths from around the corners of the Maldives, who stood up against Mohamed Nasheed (Anni). Our... [fb.me/1019Ecejv](https://fb.me/1019Ecejv)

6:51 AM · Sep 3, 2013 [Facebook](#)



Nasheed failed to create any new jobs opportunities to cater for the rising job demands!  
[#WakeUpNOW](#)

-AA- [fb.me/1VLjFqLjH](https://fb.me/1VLjFqLjH)

2:08 AM · Aug 25, 2013 [Facebook](#)



Say NO to Nasheed. A vote for Nasheed is a vote for GMR. All these people who were bribed by GMR are joining MDP... [fb.me/33zxtUN5g](https://fb.me/33zxtUN5g)

8:14 PM · Sep 13, 2013 [Facebook](#)

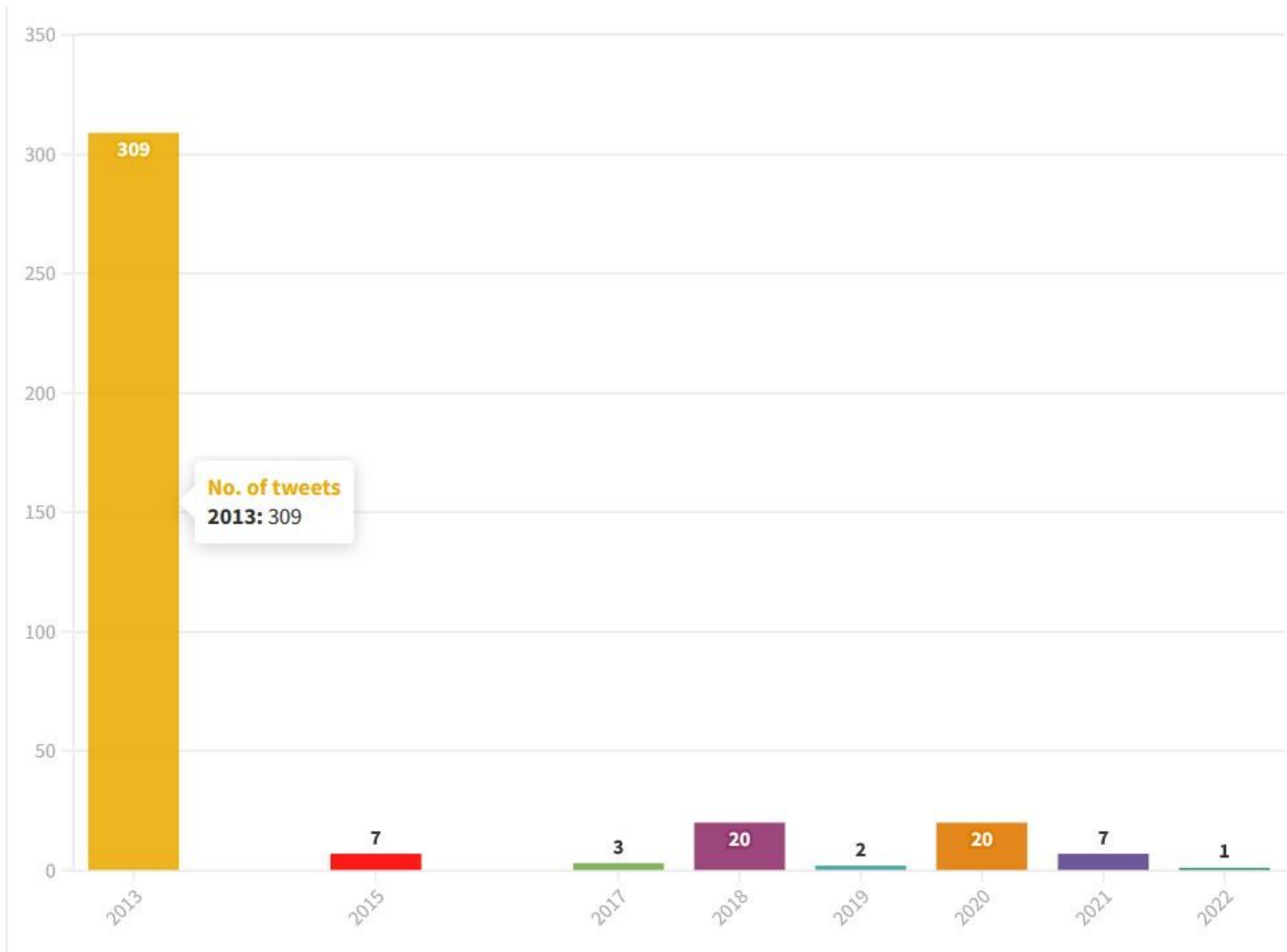
11 Retweets 1 Like

The 'facebook' in the tweets indicates, they were made using bots. A normal tweet would usually list 'Twitter web client,' 'Twitter for iPhone,' or 'Twitter for Android.'

WakeUpNow, the twitter ID became less active as Yameen went on to win the elections in Nov 2013. In early 2016, the ID sort of started PR for Yameen again but entirely stopped from July of 2016. There has been no activity reported since then.

### **The formation of Yameen's dream team:**

Ahmed Azaan who is the main campaigner for Yameen in today's time, was also an integral member (part) of WakeUpNow team. All of his tweets under the hashtag were largely against Nasheed and anything anti India. This led us to an understanding that the lad has always been an active campaigner almost all his life. Interestingly, Azaan was also one of the pioneers to use #handsoffMaldives, which dates back to Sept 2013. This hashtag was the earliest form to incite hate against India and the relationship Maldives shared with its foreign ally. In this regard, we can say the findings indicate that the campaign was not launched in 2020, but rather it was at work since 2013. With time, #handsoffMaldives of 2013 evolved into #IndiaOut in 2020.



**Fig:** Data representation showing tweets made from 2013-2022 under #handsoffMaldives

Chart shows that the most number of tweets, 309 were made in 2013. Total of 65 IDs used this hashtag.

Ihsan A. Naseer rejected Yameen's offer to become his political appointee. Yameen might have diverted his interest towards Azaan who at that time was in the nurturing stage to become his golden boy. Ahmed Azaan eventually got sponsored for his education in ADA University, Azerbaijan from 2015-2019 by Yameen, and the two have maintained good relations.

**Ihsan A. Naseer** Behind WakeUpNow

7 March 2021

I am a student of history, philosophy and economics.

From September 20th 2003 demonstration to "minivan bahu", 12-13th 2004 demonstrations in Jumhoori Maidhaan; I've played a proactive role in the reform movement.

Aged 16, I was jailed and put into solitary confinement twice on the same charges by Gayoom for allegedly making threatening phone calls to top government aides, which includes the then spokesperson Dr. Ahmed Shaheed. I was denied of medical care, my rights to an attorney and I was verbally threatened, abused and as a minor I was interrogated in the absence of my guardian.

I was denied of having a job I was selected for in Department of External Affairs. I started a career in Haveeru Daily as a journalist and left the job to Minivan for repression of editorial content. I helped start a newspaper called Haama Daily. I was expelled from CHSE after 183 days of indefinite suspension for allegedly writing an article to Sandhaanu magazine. I have paid dearly for my pursuit and my firm belief in reformation of Maldives.

I started **Wake up NOW** movement in 2013, which played an instrumental role in stopping President Nasheed's bid for a re-election. I stayed true to my ideals and turned down offers from being President Yameen's political appointee.

Unlike WakeUpNow, #handsoffMaldives stayed relevant till 2021. Though the usage of it peaked during and before 2019, it still had moderate inflow of tweets under it till 2021. The following tweets will give you an idea, how #handsoffMaldives was used to create this entire fear mongering aura regarding military presence, annexation of freedom and threat to sovereignty to benefit Yameen’s political career in this case



### The Pattern Continues in 2018 elections:

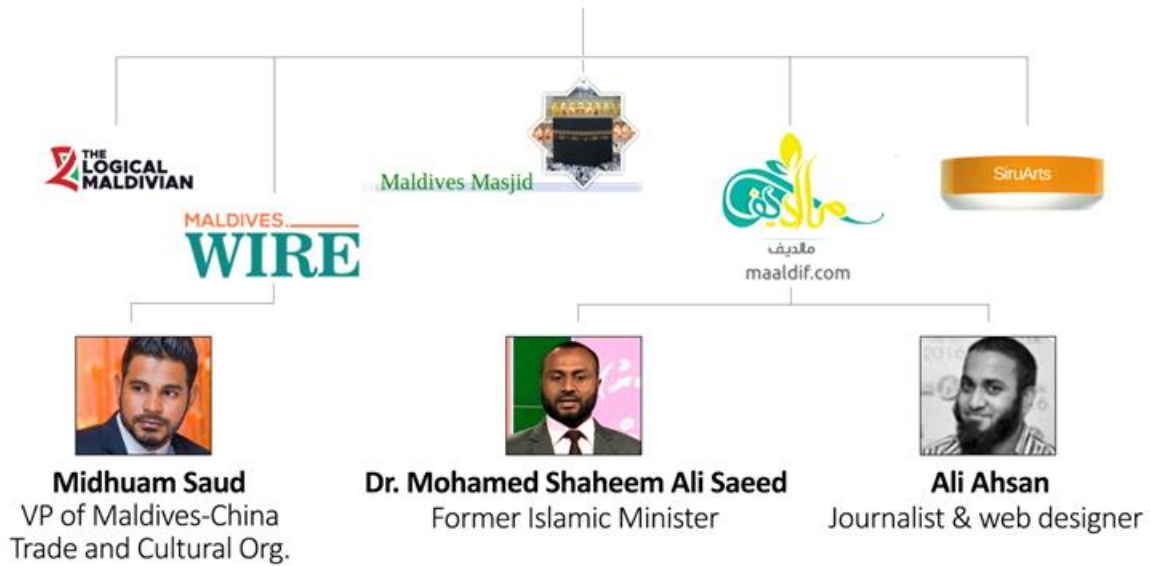
Same anti-Nasheed stance surfaced as the 2018 elections approached. Though Nasheed’s probability of contesting the 2018 elections were close to none, with Yameen sacking him under terror charges. The social media team made sure that he wouldn’t get to contest at all. Nasheed then had to put his trust on President Ibu Solih to win the elections, defeating Yameen.

Previously, we had published a report documenting, how chains of sponsored news websites emerged as the highly anticipated elections neared the date in 2018. (add link)





AdSense no. - 6955009918722743



These networks were involved in spreading misinformation. Their activity included creating doubts and listing demerits in MDP, suggesting that they are in support with Indian military to launch a coup against the then incumbent government.

Simultaneously, another group named YRY was busy endorsing Yameen in various social media platforms.

### YRY (Why Raees Yameen):

‘Why Raees Yameen’ is a team of people who had been appointed by Yameen to handle and manage his media presence. The twitter account was created in June 2018.



The key members of this team were:

- Ahmed Azaan, Co-founder Dhiyares
- Ahmed Ibrahim Co-founder & Journalist at Dhiyares
- Midhuam Saud, VP of Maldives-China Trade and Cultural Org.



**Image:** Azaan and Saud in workshops organized by YRY before elections

YRY was an initiation by Saud. He is the Vice-President of the Maldives-China Trade and Cultural Organization (MCTCO). Saud used to be a contributor writer in Maldives wire. According to our previous report, it is believed that some networks were getting funded by foreign agents to display their interest best within Maldives (refer to the above image). This included defaming and discrediting MDP and its relationship with neighboring India. Some MPs in the past have alleged that the campaign (#IndiaOut) is China-funded. Others have said that it was being managed by criminals, gangs, drug dealers and extremists.

Maybe it was the mutual appreciation towards China, that Yameen and Saud eventually shared close ties.



**Image:** Midhuam Saud with former President Abdul Gayoom Yameen during MCTCO inauguration



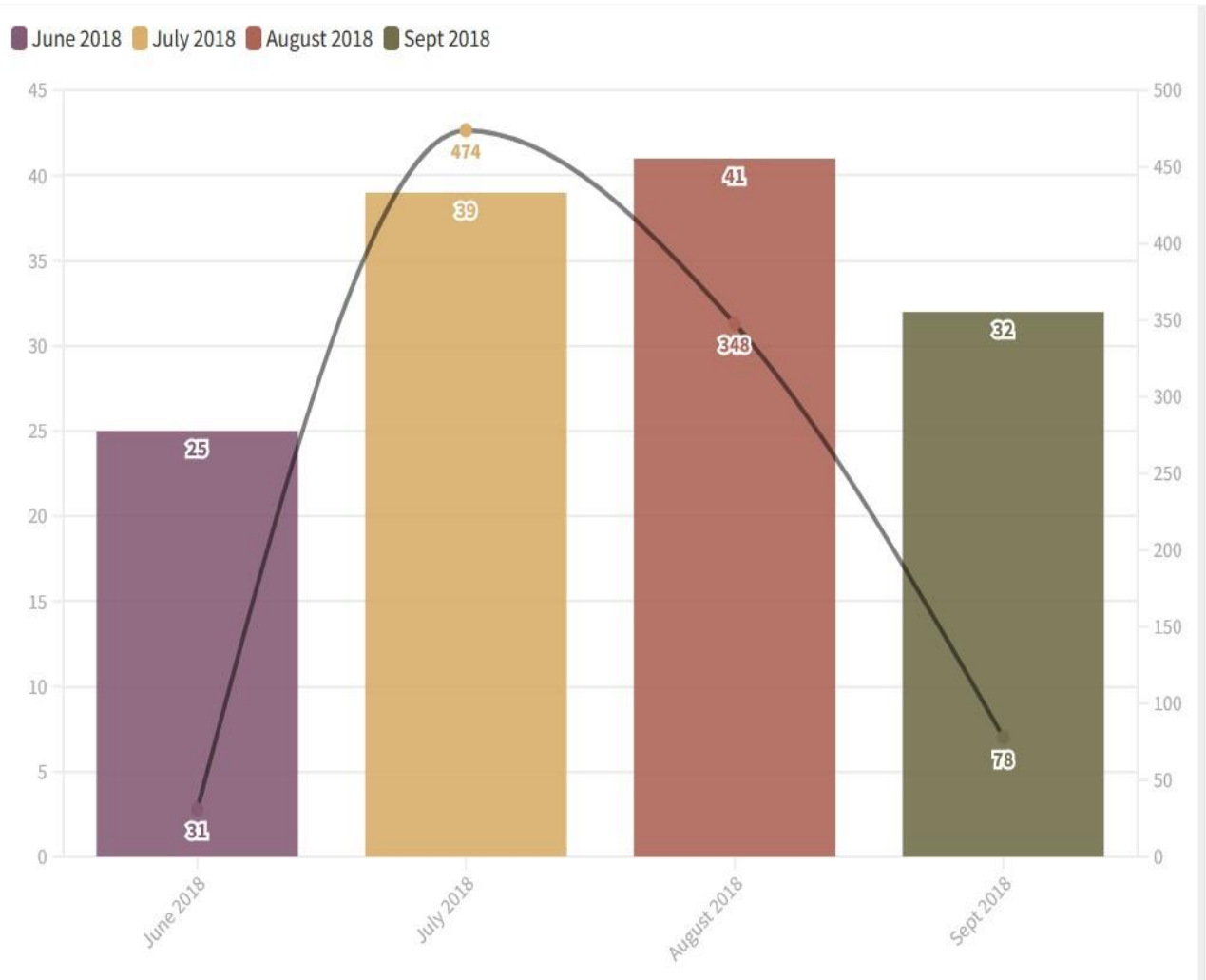
**Image:** Team Dhiyares meeting up with Pakistan High Commissioner Athar Muthar

Much of this campaign has been sustained by four sources – political parties (i.e., opposition), social media, traditional media, and China. There could be many other foreign entities that could be backing the corrupt political leader and his team, but China and Pakistan’s involvement can be seen most evidently in many cases.

An analysis of the PR activities under #YRY

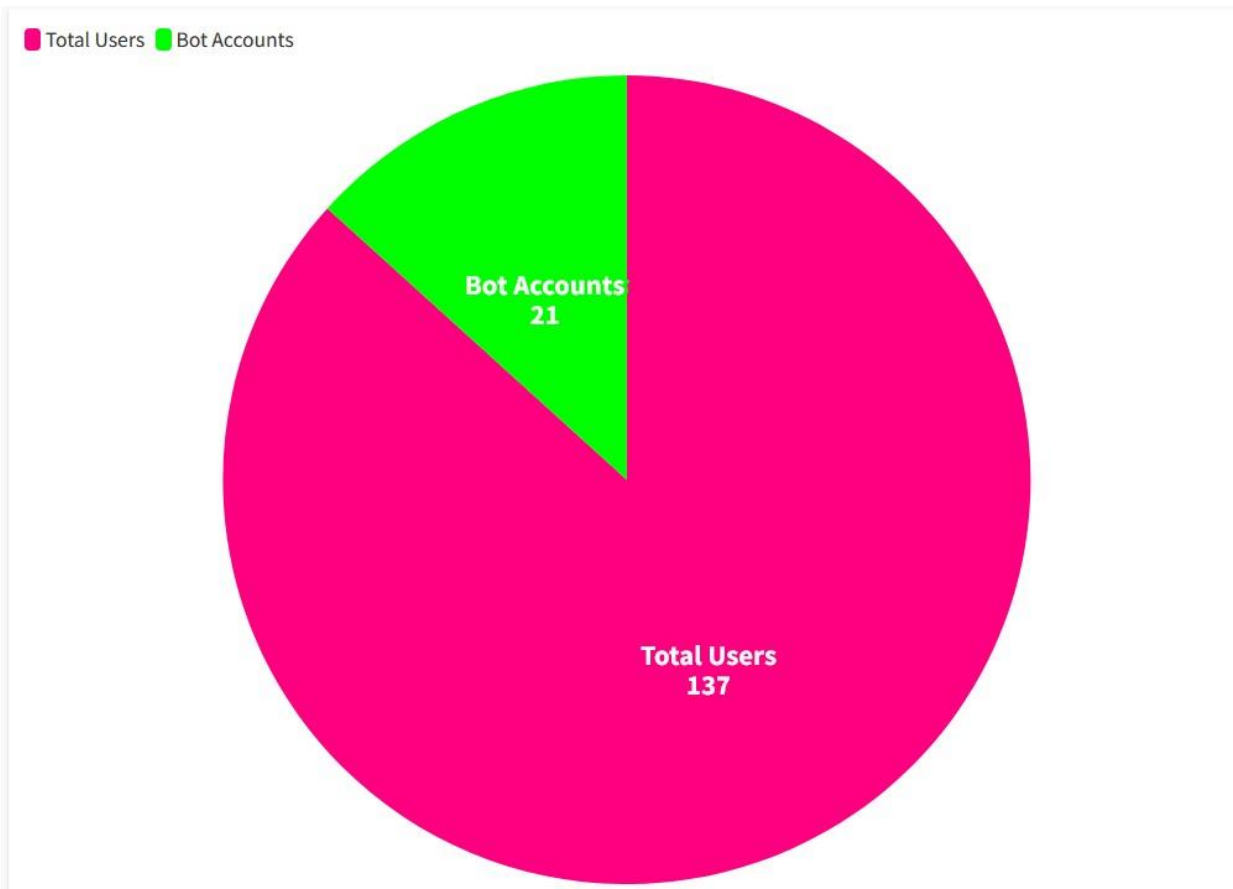
Data on #YRY tweets

Total No. of Tweets	931
No. of handles engaged in it	137
Handles created between June-Sept 2018	21



**Fig:** Total of 931 tweets were made by 137 handles

The above graph also shows that the most number of tweets were made in July and August, a total of 822 right before the elections in Sept 2018.



**Fig:** Out of the 137 users, 21 were found bots whose id creation were between July-Sept 2018.

**Fast Forward to 2022 ‘The ringleaders’:**

The purpose of ‘Why Raees Yameen’ also vanished as Yameen went on to lose the 2018 elections. Things didn’t die down there for the campaigners. If anything, the motive only grew stronger.

In Sep of 2019, Dhiyares was registered. The co-founders being:

- Ahmed Azaan
- Shifzan Ahmed
- Ahmed Ibrahim

Dhiyares is a dhivehi news site, it also has an English edition named, ‘The Maldives Journal.’ Since the beginning of their publication, they have always projected this narrative that target developmental projects Maldives have with India. They also accuse India of facilitating Yameen’s arrest. Besides posting very click baiting contents, that sometimes has no credibility, the site has contributed a lot in making this campaign take a xenophobic turn. The English edition, Maldives Journal has a total of 1800 articles at the time of writing this report and more than 300 are identified as anti-India content.

## Lets look at the timeline of what events led to the creation of Dhiyares:

Oct 2018	Al Jazeera publishes a report about US 1.5 m deposited into Ex Pres Yameen's account
Feb 2019	Corruption charges raised against Yameen
July 2019	Yameen's money laundering trial begins
Nov 2019	Yameen is convicted

A month ahead of Yameen's conviction in the MMPRC case, the website was created. This was in an attempt to gain support for Yameen.

As soon as Yameen's money laundering trial begins in July of 2019, the #IndiaOut started making a buzz. Lets refer to the table below:

11 <sup>th</sup> - 12 <sup>th</sup> July 2019	#IndiaOut surfaced in social media
12 <sup>th</sup> July 2019	Ahmed Azaan makes his first India out tweet but pauses activity for a while
June 2020	No. of tweets reduced
July 2020	Larger no. of users using the hashtag resurfaced, massive push
Oct & Nov 2020	Campaign in full swing

It is safe to assume that India Out was triggered for the political benefit of Yameen. Each time Yameen was found in a compromised position, the social media would be amplified with anti-India sentiments.

Also the copy paste mechanisms that was used in #Wakeupnow, #handsOffMaldives, #IndiaOut indicates that campaign on Twitter is organised around a few users (affiliated with the opposition) with relatively fewer original tweets that are retweeted.

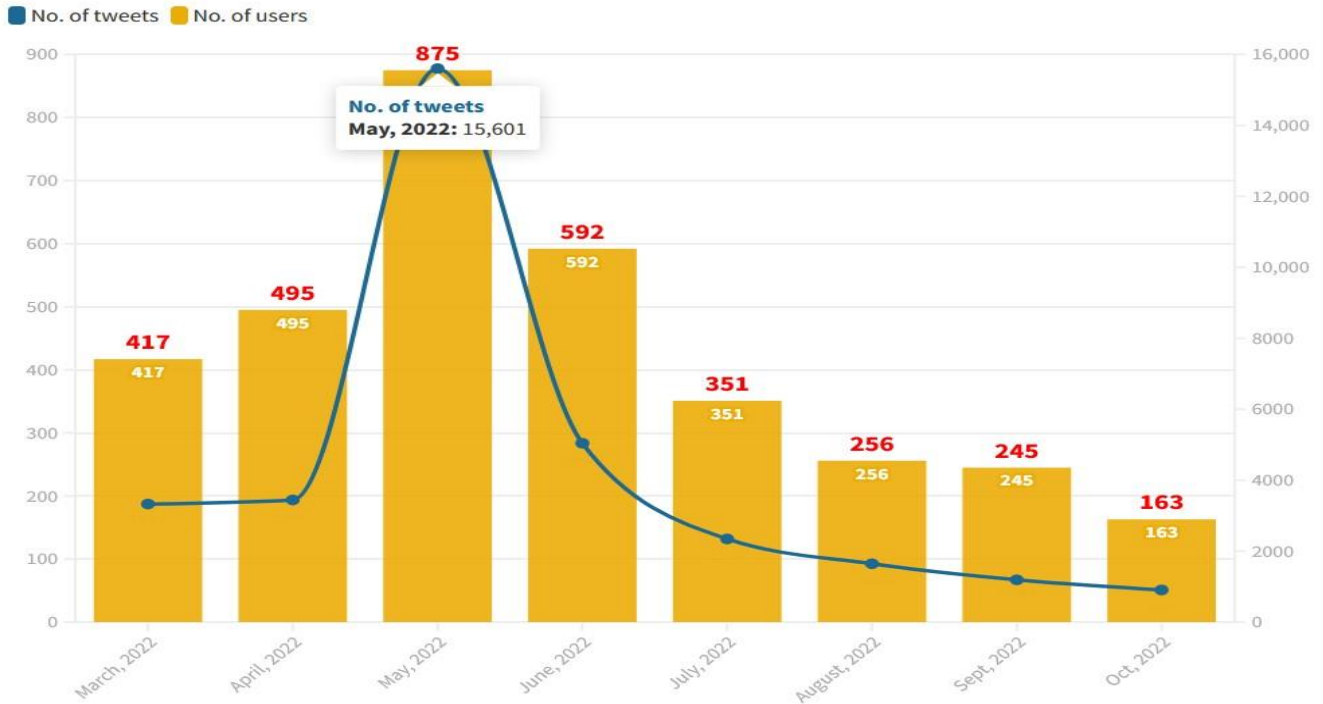
## Let's compare the previous #IndiaOut analysis to the recent data:

### Past data (Sept 2021- Feb 2022)

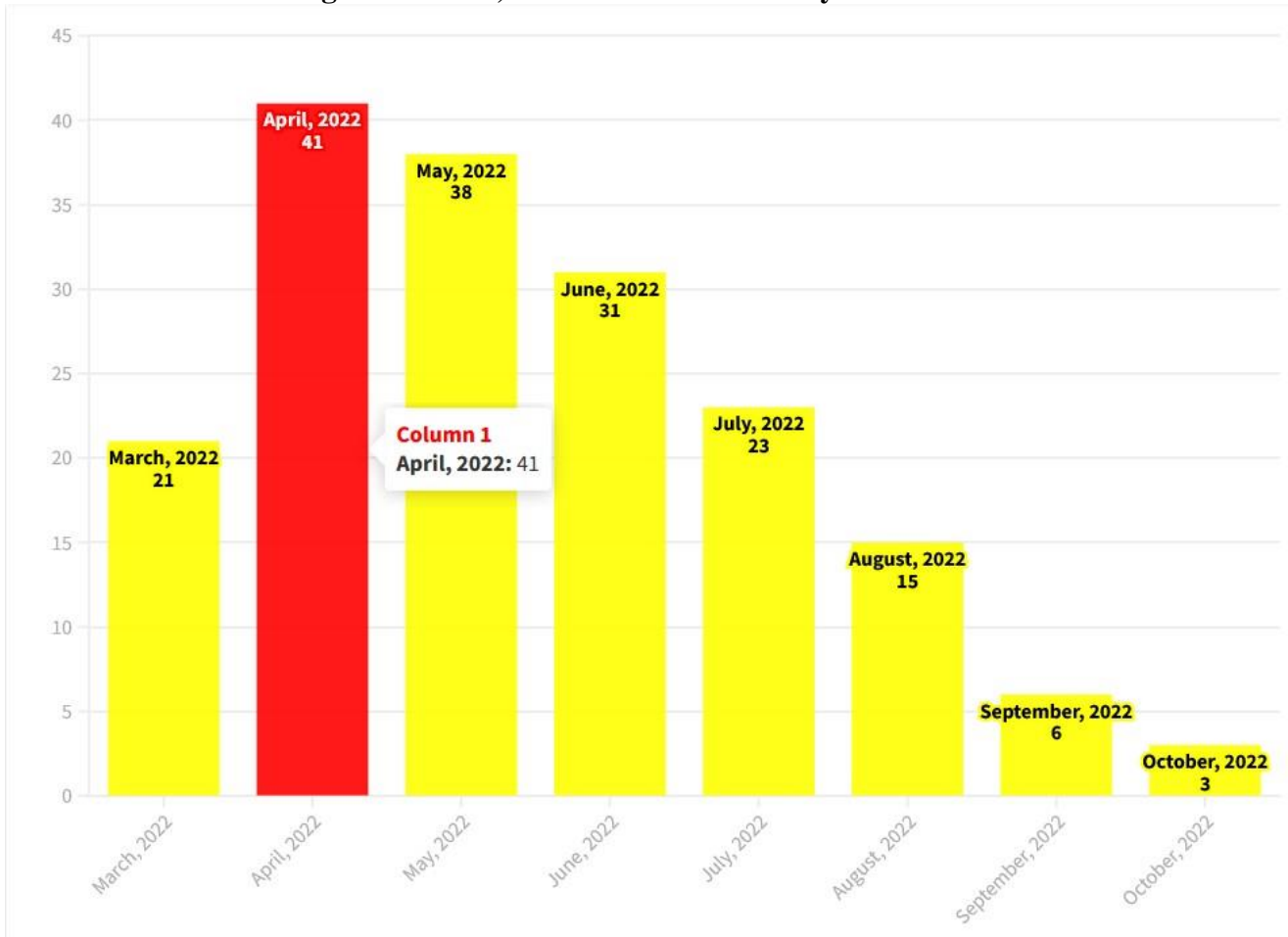
Total No. of Tweets	35,172
No. of handles engaged in it	1968
No.of new handles created	238

### Recent data (March 2022- October 2022)

Total No. of Tweets	33,600
No. of handles engaged in it	1478
No.of new handles created	178



**Fig: Total of 33,600 tweets were made by 1478 handles**



### **Fig: Total of 178 IDs created from March 2022- Oct 2022**

It can be anticipated that the number of fake ID creations will surge higher in 2023, around the time of elections. Through the data table and the graphs, it is clear that the tweets under #IndiaOut has remain constant, the inflow has neither increased nor decreased. Though there isn't a change in the social media space, the on ground activities has toned down a lot. In April, President Solih issued a decree banning the opposition's 'India Out' campaign.

When the current government took over, Maldives was very much isolated from the international community. Despite President Solih's declaration that the nation's foreign relations with any country will not be allowed to impede its sovereignty, Yameen's loyal campaigners have always tried to arouse public emotions around something that's a non-issue. The presidential order came after the country's National Security Council decided that the campaign "to incite hatred against India" is a "threat to national security." It was decided that not acting to prevent this would make it difficult for Maldives to safeguard its independence and the lives of its nationals living or traveling abroad and of foreigners living in the archipelago.

#### **Conclusion:**

Data assessment findings reveal that it is a:

1. Agenda driven campaign— main objective is to promote nationalist sentiments, glorifying Yameen as the savior and gain support for 2023 elections
2. Dissemination of anti-Govt. propaganda at large scale
3. Desperate attempt to denounce India-Maldives relations, regarding agreements signed that were initiated by predecessor Yameen's administration.
4. High manipulation of fact and misinforming
5. Use religion as a political tool