

The Didi Men

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In the Maldives Didi is a common surname of family name and when I was stationed on RAF Gan in the early 70s we had many working there. They were not permitted to live on the island and commuted from Fedu and Hittadu by rowing boat and paid the equivalent of 2 old pence and had to row themselves for the privilege.

A few anecdotes about the Maldivian workers whose command of English is mainly service, although the Education Officer gave lessons in English and maths to enable them to pass GCE University of London.

I was a shift sergeant in the Commcen (Communications Centre) and Mustafa Didi (yes its true) came in to work as a general hand. "Good morning Mustafa how's the wife? She's U/S (unserviceable) today sarge but she is off to the MO so she should be serviceable tomorrow. Will keep you informed. If an incoming VC10 is held up due to faults the letters TBN is put on the white board against the aircraft. TBN- To Be Notified . Right Mustafa "I have a few jobs for you to do first please". TBN sarge as I have a few urgent jobs for the boss to do.

Mohamed was a room boy who looked after a block of 20 rooms and was paid 50p in addition to his weekly wage. At times it was like having the wife with you because he could nag. One morning after coming off the night shift and having breakfast I was chatting to a colleague when he shouted across. Sarge get your uniform off this instant as I want to do the dhobi and have it all finished by noon. If you were asleep on sheet changing day he could change your sheets while you were asleep and you woke up to clean linen.

We were advised to keep our personal possessions secure as they could be pinched by the room boys. As I didn't smoke I used to purchase 200 cigarettes from the NAAFI and leave one packet open on my locker, he used to take one or two but nothing else and I didn't begrudge him that.

One day he came in with a magazine I had given him. He showed me a photo of ladies' underwear from Marks and Spencer and asked if I could get my wife to pop in to M&S and purchase a bra and knickers as his wife had taken a fancy to them. Now dear reader this is an island inhabited by men; with the exception of a very mature WVS lady and you write home with the request. I will leave you to your imagination as to the reply.

"Mohamed, we have a problem"? What size is the bust? Making shapes with hands. Eventually we decided on a 34", but he did find a tape measure and we had a measurement, but the cup size was small. I sent the request with an explanation and after a week or so a parcel arrived, and Mohamed took the it home. Next day the verdict was given as one of approval and brownie points were awarded to him.