

GS Paper 2

International Relations

India and its Neighbourhood
Indo-Maldives Relations

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Why is Maldives important for India?

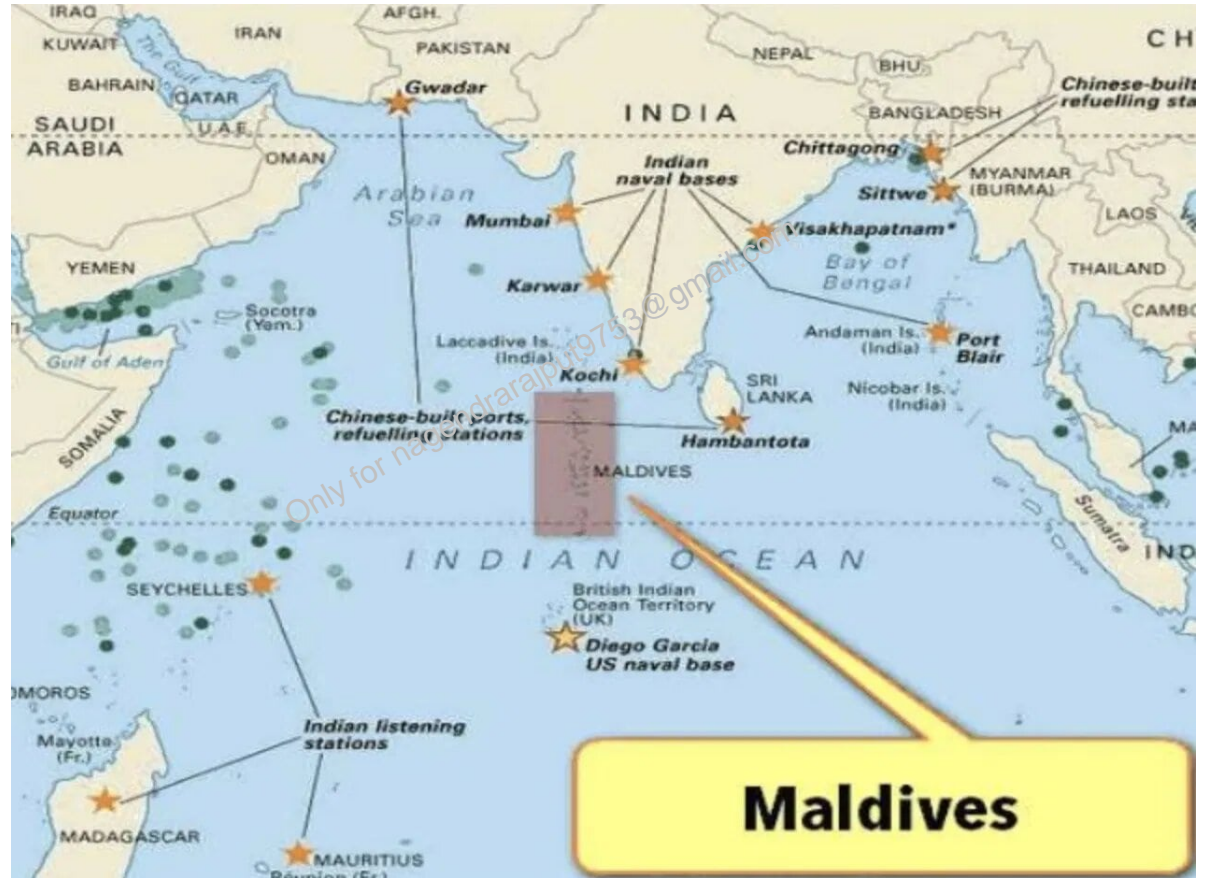
India and Maldives share ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious and commercial links and enjoy close, cordial and multi-dimensional relations.

1) Security

- **Political**
- **Maritime**



2)Economic Importance



3)Diaspora

The Maldives is home to around 25,000 Indian citizens (the **second largest expatriate community).**

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Decoding Maldives Political History and India's role

1965—26 July 1965 an agreement was signed between British and Sultan of Maldives which formally ended the British authority.

1967—A vote was taken in parliament to decide whether the Maldives should continue as a constitutional Monarchy or become a republic.

1968---A national referendum was held, 853-year-old monarchy got ended, Ibrahim Nasir became the President.

1970s---Increase in Tourism.

1975-78---Political infighting started.

- **1978**---Maumoon Abdul Gayoom became President.
- **1980-83**---A series of coup attempts by Nasir supporters.
- **1988**---Operation Cactus by India to defeat the attempted coup. (In this Indian Air Force shifted Gayoom to safe place in Male.)
- **2003**---Mohamed Nasheed founded the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) in 2003 and pressured Maumoon into allowing gradual political reforms.
- **2004**---The Maldives were devastated by a tsunami.

2008—A new constitution was approved and **Nasheed** won Presidential election. He started taking measures to reduce fiscal deficit.

2012—Nasheed resigned and Mohammed Waheed Hassan was sworn in as president.

2013—Elections took place, **Abdulla Yameen** **half-brother** of the former president Maumoon, assumed the presidency.

2015—Assassination attempt on Abdulla Yameen. State of emergency declared.

2018—**Ibrahim Mohamed Solih** became the new President.

September 2023—Maldives has elected a new President, **Mohamed Muizzu** from the **People's National Congress**. He defeated the incumbent, **Ibrahim Mohamed Solih** of the **Maldivian Democratic Party**.

Why in News?

- **September 2023--- Maldives opposition candidate Mohamed Muizzu, who supports closer ties between the Maldives and China, won the Presidential election.**

Mr. Solih, who was elected president in 2018, was battling allegations by Muizzu that he had allowed India an unchecked presence in the country. Muizzu's party, the People's National Congress, is viewed as heavily pro-China and he got elected as new President after carrying an "India Out" campaign.

Earlier also former President Yameen, leader of the People's National Congress, made the Maldives a part of China's Belt and Road initiative during his presidency from 2013 to 2018.

Former President Solih has insisted that the Indian military's presence in the Maldives was only to build a dockyard under an agreement between the two governments and that his country's sovereignty won't be violated.

Actually, in the last decade, Delhi gave the Maldives two helicopters and a small aircraft. In 2021, the Maldivian defence force said about 75 Indian military personnel were based in the country to operate and maintain the Indian aircraft.

Newly elected President Muizzu confirmed in an interview that he will request India to remove its troops on "day one" after taking over as president and that this was one of his top priorities.

- **November 2023**--Mohamed Muizzu, ^{broked}~~brooked~~ the tradition by travelling to Turkey for his first official visit. This has attracted attention since previous leaders of the island nation have chosen India as their first port of call, given the close relationship between the two countries.
- **2nd January 2024**---Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Indian archipelago Lakshadweep announced a slew of development projects and shared pictures of its pristine beauty.
- Reacting to PM of India's post, three Maldivian deputy ministers made derogatory comments, sparking outrage on Indian social media and prompting many to highlight Lakshadweep as an alternative tourist destination.(#Boycott Maldives campaign in India).

- These turn of events might affect Maldives's tourism since Indian tourists were the largest group by nationality that visited the Maldives last year, comprising nearly 11% of its tourism market.
- **8th to 12th January 2024**--Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu went for a five-day visit to China.
- **13th January 2024**---After returning from a five-day visit to China, President of Maldives said that “no country had the right to bully the island nation. We may be small, but that doesn't give you the license to bully us.”

He then went on to announce plans to secure imports of necessary food items, medications, and consumables from other nations in order to reduce the country's dependency on India.

Muizzu also noted that the Indian Ocean "does not belong" to one particular country and that Maldives "is not in anyone's backyard".

“Though we have small islands in this ocean, we have a vast exclusive economic zone of 900,000 square kilometres. Maldives is one of the countries with the biggest share of this ocean. This ocean does not belong to a specific country,” he added.

14th-15th January 2024--Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu, formally announced that the Indian government should withdraw its troops stationed in the Indian Ocean archipelagic nation before March 15, 2024.

Practice Ques/-Discuss the effect on Indo Maldives Relations with the recent regime change in Maldives.

Previous Year Question

Q/-Discuss the political developments in Maldives in the last two years. Should they be of any cause of concern to India? (UPSC, 2013)

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- **January 2023– Indian External Affairs minister S Jaishankar three-day visit to the Maldives and Sri Lanka.**

Main Take aways:

- ✓ Grant assistance of 100 million Rufiyaa [currency of Maldives] for the **High Impact Community Development Project (HICDP)** scheme. A number of socio-economic development projects are planned to be implemented throughout the country under this funding.
- ✓ Pact regarding **development of a sports complex in Gahdhoo**, and academic collaboration between **Maldives National University and Cochin University of Science and Technology**.
- ✓ **Handover of two sea ambulances** from India to the Ministry of Defence of Maldives.
- ✓ India said the **Hanimaadhoo International airport expansion project**, when completed, will actually transform the lives and livelihoods of all the people in the North of Maldives.

- **1 May 2023-- Indian Defence Minister, Rajnath Singh arrived in the Maldives on a 3-day official visit.**

Major take aways:

- ✓ India handed over two 'Made in India' platforms: a **Fast Patrol Vessel and a Landing Craft Assault ship**, to the Maldives National Defence Forces. This was described as a symbol of the shared commitment of both nations and their objectives towards peace and security in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- ✓ Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his Maldivian counterpart, Mariya Didi laid the foundation stone for the Coast Guard 'Ekatha Harbour' at Sifavaru in Uthuru Thila Falhu (UTF) atoll. The UTF project was earlier announced during EAM S. Jaishankar's visit in February 2021.

- **June 2023---Minister of State for External Affairs V Muraleedharan paid a two-day official visit to Maldives.**

Major take aways:

- ✓ June 4, 2023--India signed 10 more agreements for the implementation of high-impact projects in 11 Atolls in the Maldives as part of expanding New Delhi's development cooperation portfolio in this strategically important archipelagic nation. The MoUs will facilitate implementation of development projects in areas of Arts, Sports, Education & Health, under India's grant assistance."
- ✓ India handed over a batch of Tuberculosis medicines to the Maldives. It was stated the medicine will contribute to the India's plan to eliminate the disease from Maldives. He described health cooperation as an "important pillar" of the bilateral ties.

- **June 2023---The 12th edition of the joint military exercise “Ex Ekuverin” between the Indian Army and the Maldives National Defence Force commenced at Chaubatia, Uttarakhand.** This bilateral annual exercise, which bears the meaning of “Friends” in the Maldivian language, aims to enhance interoperability in Counter Insurgency/Counter Terrorism Operations under the UN mandate. Additionally, it provides an opportunity for both forces to carry out joint Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief operations.
- **September 2023--With presidential polls in the Maldives scheduled for September this year,** significant developments have taken place in the country’s politics. These elections, which some observers say will be among the most critical and contentious the nation has seen, will have ramifications not just for its immediate neighbours, but also for geopolitics in the Indian Ocean region.

Official Visit of President of the Republic of Maldives, Mr. Ibrahim Mohamed Solih to India (August 01–04, 2022)

The joint statement stated that PM Modi underlined Maldives’ “special place” in India’s “Neighbourhood first” policy, while President Solih “reaffirmed his government’s “India-First Policy”.” India also committed over USD 2.71 billion (30.7 billion Maldivian rufiyaa) to various projects in the country.

1)Security

- The two sides reiterated that they would not allow their territory to be used against the other. This partnership is a force for stability in the Indian Ocean Region.
- To counter the threat of transnational crime, terrorism and drug trafficking in the Indian Ocean region.

2)Male connectivity project

The two leaders also welcomed the launch of the Great Male Connectivity Project.

- ✓ It is a USD 500 million project funded by New Delhi.
- ✓ It will consist of a 6.74 km-long bridge and going to be the largest civilian infrastructure project in Maldives, connecting Male with three neighbouring islands(Villingli, Gulhifalhu and Thilafushi).
- ✓ It will use renewable energy.
- ✓ It is not only the biggest project India is doing in the Maldives but also the biggest infrastructure project in the Maldives overall.
- ✓ It carries huge Significance.

Significance of Great Male Connectivity Project

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3)Agreements

- Cybersecurity
- Capacity Building
- Housing
- Disaster Management
- Infrastructure Development (These included the development of a 100-bed state-of-the-art cancer hospital in Hulhumale and a 22,000-seater cricket stadium in the Maldives under the USD 800 million line of credit. The Hanimaadhoo international airport project's ground-breaking ceremony was attended by India's External Affairs Minister, S Jaishankar, during his visit to the Maldives in January 2023. The financing of the USD 136.6 million projects was given to India's Exim Bank through a line of credit, and the development of the airport is being executed by Indian company JMC Projects Ltd.)
- India announced USD100 million financial aid to help the island-nation complete certain infrastructure projects.

Areas of cooperation

1)Security Partnership

Recently, the **National College for Policing and Law Enforcement (NCPLE)** was inaugurated by India's External Affairs Minister during his two day visit to Maldives in 2022.

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2)Development Partnership

- Operation Neer
 - Signing of an USD80-million contract for the Addu reclamation and shore protection project.
 - A drug detoxification and rehabilitation centre in Addu built with Indian assistance.
 - Economic recovery package – India had offered Maldives an economic recovery package of \$1.4 billion during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the island nation in December 2018.
- ✓ Line of credit
- ✓ currency swap deal.

- Infrastructure development projects
- Covid-19 support-India also generated a lot of goodwill in the Maldives during the Covid19 pandemic when it gifted Covishield vaccines to the Maldives in January 2021.
- Male connectivity project.

3) Economic Cooperation

4) Connectivity

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5)Anti Terror Operations

The Joint Working Group on Counterterrorism, Countering Violent Extremism, and Deradicalization was convened with participation from both sides.

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6)Global Support

Challenges

1) Domestic Political Instability

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2) Radicalisation: Turning a hub of terrorists

3) Economic challenge

4) Growth of Anti-India sentiments - 'India Out' campaign

5) Lack of transparency

6) Misunderstanding regarding India's efforts

- **Uthuru Thila Falhu (UTF) Naval Base**

7) China Angle

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Way Forward

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