

1.10. INDIA-MALDIVES

INDIA- MALDIVES RELATIONS AT A GLANCE

India and Maldives share ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious and commercial links steeped in antiquity. Except for a brief period between February 2012 to November 2018 (when there was pro-China government in Maldives), relations have been close, cordial and multi-dimensional. However, recently, protests under "India Out" campaign have increased in pitch in the Maldives which targets the presence of Indian military personnel in the Maldives over apprehension that the government is planning to hand over the Uthuru thilafalhu atoll to the Indian Navy.



Bilateral trade stands at US\$ 246 million, heavily in favour of India.



India emerged as Maldives' 2nd largest trade partner in 2020.

BILATERAL RELATIONS



Areas of Cooperation

- ➔ **Bilateral Economic and Trade Relations:** Greater Male Connectivity Project to be developed by India will be a major catalyst for the Maldivian economy.
- ➔ **Security and Defence Cooperation:** Comprehensive Action Plan for Defence to consolidate defence partnership, Composite Training Centre, Coastal Radar System (CRS) etc.
- ➔ **Development Assistance projects by India:** Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital, Maldives Institute of Technical Education, Technology Adoption Programme in Education Sector in Maldives etc. and projects under High-Impact Community Development projects scheme.
- ➔ **Humanitarian Assistance by India:** During the 1988 coup attempt, the 2004 Tsunami, during 2014 water crisis in Malé (Operation NEER), supply of measles vaccine and rapid and comprehensive assistance since the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ➔ **Other areas** such as tourism including medical tourism, cultural exchange, people to people contacts etc.



Significance of Maldives for India

- ➔ **Geostrategic:** Important member of India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy and SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision.
- ➔ **Geopolitical:** China's 'Belt and Road' Initiative (BRI), involving the Maldives has widened the Chinese sphere of influence that has potential to adversely impact India's interests.
- ➔ **Goeconomics:** 50 per cent of India's external trade and 80 per cent of her energy imports transit through the Sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) in the vicinity of the Maldives.
- ➔ **Role of Net security Provider:** Maldives is positioned like a 'toll gate' between the western Indian Ocean and the eastern Indian Ocean.
- ➔ **Regional Cooperation** through platforms like SAARC, SASEC, IORA and IONS.



Challenges

- ➔ **Domestic Politics in Maldives:** Till 2018, political leaders openly displayed their hostility towards India and preference for China. Later on, as regime changed, India-First Policy was announced in 2018.
- ➔ **China's influence:** Maldives growing proximity to China and endorsement of belt and road initiative.
- ➔ **Concerns of expatriate workers** particularly the unskilled workers in Maldives.



Way Forward

- ➔ **Deepening security cooperation** through mechanisms like 'Colombo Security Conclave'.
- ➔ **Adhering to Gujral doctrine** of 5 basic principles to guide India-Maldives relations

India-Maldives are perfectly placed to complement each other's strategic interests. In accordance with the Neighbourhood First Policy of the government, India remains a committed development partner for a stable, prosperous and peaceful Maldives.