

India-Maldives

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India-Maldives: Strengthening Diplomacy, Security, and Development

Context

India's Prime Minister recently participated as the **Guest of Honour** at the **60th Independence Day celebrations** of the **Maldives**, reflecting the significance India places on its close neighbour and strategic partner in the Indian Ocean region.

Introduction

India and the Maldives share a **multifaceted and time-tested relationship** rooted in historical, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious, and economic linkages. Their partnership spans across various sectors, including **diplomacy, defence, economic development, humanitarian aid, and regional security**, evolving into a comprehensive cooperation framework.

Key Pillars of India-Maldives Relations

Geostrategic Significance

Maldives is located about **700 km southwest of the Indian mainland**, near vital international sea routes. Its position in the **Indian Ocean** gives it strategic importance for **maritime security and international trade routes**.

Historical and Cultural Ties

There is a long history of interaction, including the belief that **Sri Soorudasaruna Adeettiya**, an Indian prince, established one of the earliest forms of government in the Maldives.

India was among the **first countries to recognize Maldivian independence in 1965**.

Cultural links continue through **Indian expatriates** in healthcare and education sectors.

Political and Diplomatic Cooperation

India's **timely intervention in the 1988 coup attempt** strengthened political trust and laid the foundation for deeper engagement.

The Maldives features prominently in India's '**Neighbourhood First**' policy, which aims to enhance **regional stability, development, and connectivity**.

Diplomatic missions were established in **1972 (India in Maldives)** and **2004 (Maldives in**

India).

Both nations are members of **SAARC**.

Economic and Developmental Engagement

India is involved in several infrastructure and development projects, including:

- **Addu Development Project** (water, sanitation, roads, land reclamation)
- **Greater Male Connectivity Project**
- **Port and airport development projects**

India recently extended a **₹4,850 crore Line of Credit** to support infrastructure and developmental initiatives.

Direct air connectivity and social housing schemes further boost people-centric development.

Security and Defence Partnership

India and the Maldives conduct the annual '**Ekuverin**' **military exercise** to strengthen defence ties.

Both countries are part of the **Colombo Security Conclave**, formed in **2011**, focusing on **maritime security, marine pollution response, and search and rescue operations** in the region.

India will provide **72 heavy vehicles** to the Maldivian Ministry of Defence to enhance logistics and operational capabilities.

Humanitarian Support and Disaster Relief

India has consistently played the role of **first responder**, providing aid during the:

- **2004 tsunami**
- **2014 Malé water crisis**
- **COVID-19 pandemic**

Recent Initiatives and Agreements

Trade and Economic Cooperation

India initiated discussions for a **Free Trade Agreement** with the Maldives.

Bilateral trade and investment cooperation are being expanded through credit support and sectoral engagements.

Blue Economy and Fisheries

Joint efforts in **sustainable tuna fishing, deep-sea fisheries, aquaculture, and eco-tourism** aim to support ocean-based livelihoods and sustainability.

Digital Collaboration

India is supporting the Maldives in adopting **digital public infrastructure**, including integration of the **Unified Payments Interface (UPI)** system to enhance digital financial services.

Health and Pharma

India is facilitating access to affordable Indian medicines and helping align **Maldivian health standards** with the **Indian pharmacopoeia**.

Connectivity and Urban Development

India has implemented direct flight services to enhance **tourism and economic linkages**.

India also handed over **3,300 social housing units in Hulhumalé** and inaugurated **road and drainage systems** in Addu City.

Challenges in the Relationship

India Out Campaign

Starting in **2020**, protests emerged in the Maldives against perceived Indian influence, spreading widely on **social media platforms**.

Lack of Transparency

Concerns were raised over the **opaque nature** of some bilateral agreements signed during President Solih's administration.

Military Presence Allegations

Claims about the **presence of Indian military personnel** in the Maldives have caused unease among sections of the local population, sparking political and media debates.

Key Outcomes of Recent Agreements

Strengthened Maritime Security

Joint operations and intelligence-sharing will help combat **piracy, smuggling, and terrorism** in the Indian Ocean.

Boost to Tourism

Improved connectivity and infrastructure projects are expected to increase **tourist inflows**, benefiting the economy of both nations.

Enhanced Digital Capabilities

Adoption of India's **digital payment infrastructure** is enabling the Maldives to advance in **e-governance and financial inclusion**.

Countering Geopolitical Challenges

India's growing engagement helps **limit China's strategic influence** in the Indian Ocean, particularly against the backdrop of China's **"String of Pearls" strategy**.

Trade Expansion

Trade facilitation and free trade agreements are expected to result in **increased economic collaboration** and **investment flow** between the two countries.

Conclusion

India-Maldives relations continue to serve as a **model of regional cooperation, mutual respect, and strategic engagement**. While challenges remain, the **shared vision for peace, prosperity, and development** offers ample scope for deepening this vital partnership. Moving forward, India must maintain its commitment to **soft diplomacy, capacity building, and sustainable development** to preserve and enhance bilateral trust and collaboration.



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