



India-Maldives' Judicial Cooperation

For Prelims: SAARC, SASEC, Operation Cactus, Mission SAGAR, Greater Male Connectivity Project

For Mains: India-Maldives Relations, India and its Neighbourhood, Bilateral Groupings & Agreements

Why in News?

Recently, the Government has approved the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in the field of judicial cooperation between **India and the Judicial Service Commission of Maldives**.

- It is the **eighth MoU signed between India and other countries in the field of Judicial Cooperation**.
- Earlier, the **National College for Policing and Law Enforcement (NCPLE)** was inaugurated by India's External Affairs Minister during his two day visit to Maldives.
 - NCPLE is one of India's largest funded projects in the island nation - in the Maldives' Addu City.



What is the Significance of MoU?

- It will provide a **platform to tap the benefits of Information Technology for court**

digitization, and can be a potential growth area for the **IT (Information Technology)** companies and **start-ups** in both the countries.

- The good relations between the two countries will receive further impetus.
- It will not only enable exchange of knowledge and technology in judicial and other legal areas between the two countries but **will also further the objectives of 'Neighbourhood First' policy**.

What is the Significance of India-Maldives Relations?

- Maldives is a **Toll Gate in the Indian Ocean**.
- It is located at the **southern and northern parts of this island chain lies the two important Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs)**.
 - These SLOCs are **critical for maritime trade flow between the Gulf of Aden and Gulf of Hormuz in West Asia and the Strait of Malacca** in Southeast Asia.
 - Nearly 50% of India's external trade and 80% of its energy imports transit these SLOCs in the Arabian Sea.
- Maldives is a member of the **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)** and the **South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC)**.

What are the Highlights of India-Maldives Relations?

- **Security Cooperation:** Through the decades, India has rushed emergency assistance to the Maldives, whenever sought.
 - In 1988, when armed mercenaries attempted a coup against President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, India sent paratroopers and Navy vessels and restored the legitimate leadership under **Operation Cactus**.
 - India and Maldives conduct the joint military exercise **'Ekuverin'**.
 - **Under the Colombo Security Conclave**, which is a maritime security grouping of India, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Mauritius which is to forge closer cooperation on maritime and security matters among these **Indian Ocean countries**.
 - Mauritius was included as a new member of the conclave during the fifth meeting of national security advisers of the Colombo Security Conclave.
- **Disaster Management:** The 2004 tsunami and the drinking water crisis in Male a decade later were **other occasions when India rushed assistance**.
 - The Maldives has been one of the biggest beneficiaries of the Covid-19 assistance and **vaccines delivered by India** among India's all neighbouring countries.
 - The Maldives was the first beneficiary of **India's Vaccine Maitri initiative**.
 - When the world supply chains were blocked because of the pandemic, India continued to provide crucial commodities to the Maldives under **Mission SAGAR**.
- **People To People Contact:** Maldivian students attend educational institutions in India and patients fly here for super speciality healthcare, aided by a liberal visa-free regime extended by India.
- **Economic Cooperation:** Tourism is the mainstay of Maldivian economy. The country is now a major tourist destination for some Indians and a job destination for others.
 - In August 2021, Afcons, an Indian company, signed a contract for the largest-ever infrastructure project in Maldives which is the **Greater Male Connectivity Project (GMCP)**.

What are the Challenges in India-Maldives Relation?

- **Political Instability:** India's major concern has been the **impact of political instability in the neighbourhood** on its security and development.
 - The February 2015 arrest of Maldives' opposition leader Mohamed Nasheed on terrorism charges and the consequent political crisis have posed a real diplomatic test for India's neighbourhood policy.
- **Radicalisation:** In the past decade or so, the **number of Maldivians drawn towards terrorist groups like the Islamic State (IS)** and Pakistan-based madrassas and jihadist groups has been increasing.
 - This gives rise to the possibility of Pakistan based terror groups using remote Maldivian

islands as a launch pad for terror attacks against India and Indian interests.

- **China Angle:** China's strategic footprint in India's neighbourhood has increased. The Maldives has emerged as an important 'pearl' in **China's "String of Pearls"** construct in South Asia.
 - Given the uncertain dynamics of Sino-Indian relations, China's strategic presence in the Maldives remains a concern.
 - Also, the Maldives have started using the China card to bargain with India.

Way Forward

- Although India continues to be an important partner of the Maldives, **India must not grow complacent over its position and must remain attentive** to the developments in the Maldives.
- India must **play a key role within Indo-Pacific security space** to ensure regional security in South Asia and surrounding maritime boundaries.
 - The Indo-Pacific security space has been developed as a response to the growth of extra-regional powers (particularly China's) in India's maritime sphere of influence.
- At present, the 'India Out' campaign has support from a limited population, **but this cannot be taken for granted** by the Indian government.
 - If the issues raised by the supporters of the 'India Out' are not handled carefully and India does not effectively convince the Maldivians about its intentions behind the projects on the island nation, the campaign may change the domestic political situation in the Maldives and may set ripples in India's currently favourable relationship with the country.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Which one of the following pairs of islands is separated from each other by the 'Ten Degree Channel'? (2014)

- (a) Andaman and Nicobar
- (b) Nicobar and Sumatra
- (c) Maldives and Lakshadweep
- (d) Sumatra and Java

Ans: (a)

EXP:

- The Ten Degree Channel separates the Andaman group of islands from the Nicobar group of islands.
- Nicobar and Sumatra are separated by the Six Degree Channel.
- The Eight Degree Channel separates the islands of Minicoy (part of Lakshadweep group) and Maldives.
- Java and Sumatra islands of Indonesia are separated by the Sunda Strait.

Mains

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

Source: PIB

