



India Maldives Relations

For Prelims: [India Maldives Relations](#), [Vajrayana Buddhism](#), [Neighbourhood First policy](#), Operation Cactus

For Mains: Present Concerns Related to Tourism between India and Maldives, Major Aspects of India and Maldives Relations

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Why in News?

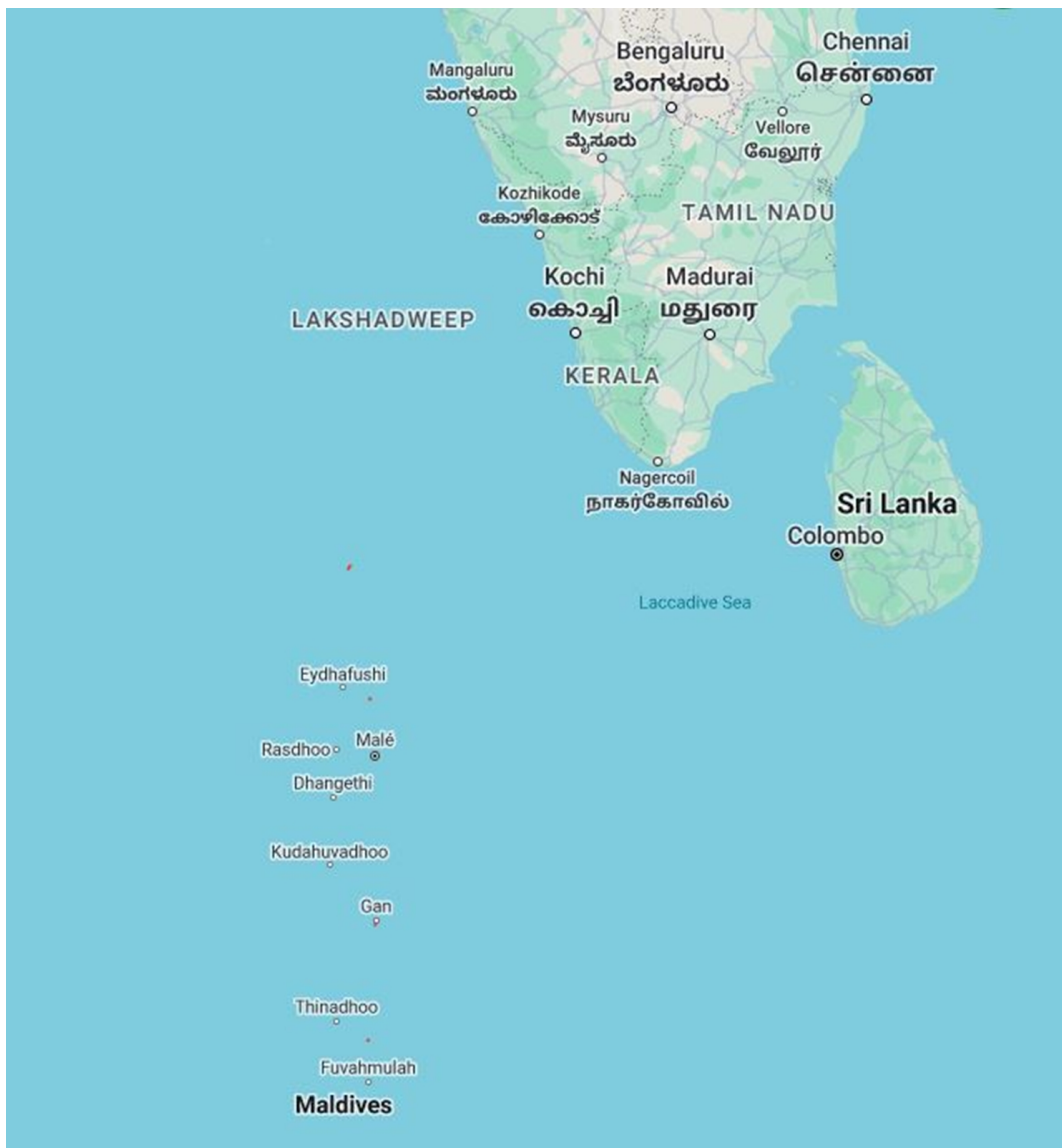
The [Maldives](#) has recently found itself in the **midst of diplomatic turmoil**, raising questions about its **relations with India** through **undiplomatic remarks, military positioning, and the scrapping of crucial agreements**.

- Maldives has also signed **new deals with [China](#)**, further complicating the geopolitical landscape.

What are the Major Points Related to India and Maldives Relations?

- **Historical Ties:** The diplomatic and political relationship between India and the Maldives dates back to **1965 when the British relinquished control of the islands**.
 - Since the democratic transition in 2008, India has invested years in building deep relationships with various stakeholders in the Maldives, including political, military, business, and civil society figures.

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▪ Maldives' Significance for India:

- **Strategic Location:** Located south of India, the **Maldives holds immense strategic importance in the Indian Ocean**, acting as a gateway to the Arabian Sea and beyond.
 - This allows India to **monitor maritime traffic and enhance regional security**.
- **Cultural Link:** India and Maldives share a deep cultural and historical connection dating back centuries.
 - Until the first half of the 12th century, Buddhism was the principal religion in the Maldivian islands.
 - There is an inscription of **Vajrayana Buddhism**, that had existed in the Maldives in ancient times.
- **Regional Stability:** A stable and prosperous Maldives aligns with **India's "Neighbourhood First" policy**, promoting peace and security in the Indian Ocean region.

▪ India's Significance for Maldives:

- **Essential Supplies:** India is a crucial supplier of everyday essentials, including **rice, spices, fruits, vegetables, and medicines**.
 - India also aids in building Maldivian infrastructure by providing materials like cement and rock boulders.
- **Education:** India serves as the primary education provider for Maldivian students who pursue **higher education in Indian institutions**, including scholarships for deserving students.
- **Disaster Assistance:** India has been a consistent source of aid during crises, such as **tsunamis and drinking water shortages**.
 - The provision of essential items and support during the Covid-19 pandemic

showcases India's role as a reliable partner.

- **Security Provider:** India has a history of providing security assistance, intervening during a **coup attempt in 1988** through **Operation Cactus** and conducting joint naval exercises for the protection of the Maldives.
 - Joint Exercises include- **“Ekuverin”, “Dosti” and “Ekatha”**.
- **India's Dominance in Maldives Tourism:** Indian tourists have become the leading source market for the Maldives since the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2023, **they accounted for a significant 11.2% of total tourist arrivals**, amounting to 18.42 lakh visitors.

INDIANS TRAVELLING TO THE MALDIVES

	Tourist	Share*
2023	2,06,026	11.18%
2022	2,41,382	14.41%
2021	2,91,787	22.07%
2020	62,960	11.33%
2019	1,66,030	9.75%
2018	90,474	6.10%



Note

Eight Degree Channel separates Indian Minicoy (part of Lakshadweep Islands) from that of Maldives.

What are the Major Challenges Related to India Maldives Relations?

- **India-Out Campaign:** In recent years, Maldivian politics has witnessed a campaign centered on an **"India Out" platform**, branding Indian presence as a threat to Maldivian sovereignty.
 - Key campaign points include the demand for the withdrawal of Indian military personnel.
 - Current Maldives' President has set a deadline of 15th March, 2024, for the withdrawal of Indian troops.
- **Tourism Strain:** The tourism scenario in the Maldives has gained significant focus due to a diplomatic dispute arising from **disparaging comments directed at the Indian Prime Minister** after his promotional visit to the Lakshadweep islands.
 - Consequently, a **boycott Maldives** trend has been floating social media as a response to the controversy.
- **China's Rising Influence in Maldives:** Chinese is becoming increasingly visible in the Maldives. The Maldives' proximity to key shipping lanes and India makes it **strategically important for**

China, potentially fueling its interest in deeper engagement.

- It has caused unease in India and could lead to a regional geopolitical contest.

What are the Key Takeaways From Recent China-Maldives Deals?

- **Elevation of Bilateral Ties:**
 - **China and Maldives** announced the **elevation of their countries' ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership**, signifying the deepening of their relationship.
- **Key Agreements:**
 - **Belt and Road Initiative:** The nations will jointly **accelerate the formulation of the Cooperation Plan on the Belt and Road Initiative**, fostering connectivity and infrastructure development.
 - **Tourism Cooperation:** Both countries pledged to **strengthen collaboration in the tourism sector**, recognizing its significance to the Maldives' economy.
 - **Disaster Risk Reduction:** The agreements encompass cooperation in disaster risk reduction, emphasizing joint efforts to address and mitigate the impact of natural disasters.
 - **Blue Economy:** They expressed their commitment to advancing cooperation in the **blue economy**, focusing on sustainable use of ocean resources.
 - **Digital Economy:** Efforts to strengthen investments in the digital economy were underscored.
- **Economic Assistance:**
 - China has extended support to the Maldives by providing grant assistance, although the specific amount remains undisclosed. T
 - The agreements also highlight the importance of China-Maldives trade, with bilateral trade in 2022 totaling USD 451.29 million.

Conclusion

- The Maldives government taking swift action by suspending ministers reflects an effort to manage the crisis. Therefore, both countries should **engage in regular diplomatic dialogue to rebuild trust**. Cooperating on **shared concerns, addressing grievances** and emphasizing the long-standing ties that have benefited both nations can pave the way for a **diplomatic resolution**.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

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)**