



India Maldives Relations

For Prelims: Geography of Maldives, Greater Male Connectivity Project, India Maldives Relations, Indian Ocean Region

For Mains: India-Maldives Relations, India and its Neighbourhood

Why in News?

Recently, the Prime Minister of India held bilateral talks with the visiting **Maldives President**.

- The Prime Minister while highlighting the threat of **transnational crime, terrorism and drug trafficking** in the **Indian Ocean** **said that the** coordination between India and Maldives in the field of **defence and security** is vital for peace and stability.



What are the Outcomes of the Bilateral Talks?

- **Security:**
 - To counter the threat of **transnational crime, terrorism and drug trafficking** in the Indian Ocean region, India will give **24 vehicles and one naval boat** to the **Maldives Security Force** and help **train the island-nation's security personnel**.
 - India will also cooperate in building **police facilities in 61 islands of Maldives**.
- **Male connectivity project:**

- The two leaders also welcomed the launch of the **Greater Male Connectivity Project**, a USD 500 million project funded by New Delhi.
 - Both leaders participated in the virtual “pouring of the first concrete” ceremony of the USD500-million Greater Male Connectivity Project, being **built under grant and concessional loan support from India**.
- **Agreements:**
 - The countries signed six agreements to expand cooperation in a range of areas in Maldives, including:
 - **Cybersecurity**
 - Capacity Building
 - Housing
 - **Disaster Management**
 - **Infrastructure Development**
 - India announced USD100 million financial aid to help the island-nation complete certain infrastructure projects.

How has India’s Relations with Maldives been?

- **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.
- **Rehabilitation Centre:**
 - 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.
 - The centre is **one of 20 high impact community development projects** being implemented by India in areas such as **healthcare, education, fisheries, tourism, sports** and **culture**.
- **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)**.
 - India is Maldives **2nd largest trading partner** – rising up from its 4th position in 2018.
 - In 2021, **bilateral trade registered a growth of 31%** over the previous year – overcoming the pandemic-related challenges.

What are the Challenges in India Maldives Relations?

- **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 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)

Q. What do you understand by 'The String of Pearls'? How does it impact India? Briefly outline the steps taken by India to counter this. **(2013)**

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

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