

India - Maldives Relations

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Context- Recently the Indian Foreign minister visited Maldives in a bid to strengthen ties.

Key Highlights

- In past years, the relationship has been strained, with the Maldives seeking closer ties with China and India's concerns over Chinese influence in the region.
- Regarding this, India and Maldives have signed several pacts including development projects as External Affairs minister S Jaishankar visited the Maldives to hold talks with the top leadership in the country.
- Both India and Maldives have signed a pact to grant assistance of 100 million Rufiyaa [currency of Maldives] for the High Impact Community Development Project (HICDP) scheme.
- Under this funding, various socio-economic development projects to be implemented throughout the country to improve basic necessities.
- Also development of a sports complex in Gahdhoo, and academic collaboration between Maldives National University and Cochin University of Science and Technology to be conducted.
- India will hand over two sea ambulances to the Ministry of Defence of Maldives for emergency needs and humanitarian crises.
- India will send about 10,000 school books to be distributed in 260 schools in the Maldives.

India and Maldives

- Both India and the Maldives have a long-standing relationship, with historical and cultural ties dating back centuries.
- India was among the first countries to recognize Maldives after its independence in 1965 and to establish diplomatic relations with the country.
- India has been one of the Maldives' closest allies and partners for a long time.
- India has provided economic, technical, as well as military assistance to the Maldives.
- India has also extended a \$1.4 billion financial assistance package to Maldives for socio-economic development.
- India has agreed to provide a \$800 million line of credit to Maldives for infrastructure development.
- India and Maldives have been cooperating in areas of defense and security, with regular exchange of high-level visits and joint exercises like Exercise EKUVERIN
- India has been a major tourism market for Maldives with a current share of nearly 14.4 percent of its tourism market share.

Importance

- **Strategic location:** Maldives sits at the crossroads of major international shipping lanes, and its location gives India a strategic advantage in the Indian Ocean region.
- **Defense and security:** India and the Maldives have a close defense and security relationship, with regular high-level visits and certain joint exercises.
- **Economic ties:** Maldives is a major tourist destination, and India is one of its largest source markets for the tourism sector.
- **Cultural and historical ties:** India and the Maldives have a long history of cultural and historical ties, dating back centuries. Its shared history has helped to strengthen the relationship between the two countries.
- **Countering Chinese influence:** India has been concerned about the growing Chinese influence in the Maldives as well as in the Indian ocean region. India has been trying to strengthen its ties with Maldives and other Indian Ocean countries in order to counter the Chinese influence and assert its own regional leadership.

Challenges

- **Political instability:** Change in government and a constitutional crisis has led to political instability in the Maldives and raised tensions between the two nations.
- **China's increasing influence:** India has always been concerned about the growing Chinese influence in the Maldives, including large infrastructure projects and loans.
- **Economic issues:** The Maldives has been constantly facing an economic crisis, which has led to delays in the implementation of development projects and debt issues.
- **Difference in approach to terrorism and extremism:** India has been concerned about the rise of Islamic extremism in the Maldives and it has been urging the Maldives government to take firm action against it. However, Maldives has its own approach and concerns regarding the same.
- **Tourism:** India has been a huge market for Maldives tourism, but the Maldives has been trying to diversify its tourism market and reduce its dependence on India.

Way ahead

- Although India must try to assert its regional leadership in the Indian Ocean region, but not at the cost of Maldives aligning itself with the interests of China.
- Considering the growth in India's economy and diplomatic area of influence, there is a need to revisit India's role in regional politics.