

Indo-Maldives relations

December 27, 2018

Manifest pedagogy

Maldives, though a small country is important from 2 perspectives :

1. It is a neighbouring country
2. It is located in the Indian Ocean Region

Its increasing importance in recent times has to be seen in the context of rising Chinese assertiveness in the Indian Ocean.

UPSC aspirants may tend to neglect Maldives being a small country, but a question in mains is a probability.

In news

Visit of the newly-elected President of the Maldives, Ibrahim Solih to India.

Placing it in syllabus

Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests

Static dimensions

1. Indo- Maldives relations- historical aspects

Current dimensions

1. Relations after the new government
2. Its importance to India with respect to Indian Ocean security

Content

Indo- Maldives relations : Historical aspects

Relations between India and Maldives have been friendly and close in strategic, economic and military cooperation. India has contributed to maintaining security on the island nation.

Key Developments

- Both nations established diplomatic relations after the independence of Maldives from British rule in 1966.
- India was one of the first nations to recognize Maldives' independence. Since then, India and Maldives have developed close strategic, military, economic and cultural relations.
- Indian Army's '**Operation Cactus**' foiled a coup in Maldives that was attempted by a pro-Eelam group in 1988. India maintains a naval presence in Maldives, at the request of the Maldives, since 2009.
- **Ekuverin**, an annual **joint military exercise** has been held every year **since 2009** between India and Maldives. The exercise aims to enhance the inter-operability between the Indian Army and Maldives National Defence Force in order to effectively undertake counter-terrorism operations in urban or semi-urban environments.
- India has provided extensive economic aid and has participated in bilateral programmes for the development of infrastructure, health, civil aviation, telecommunications and labour resources. It established **the Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital in Malé**, expanded telecommunications and air links and increased scholarships for Maldivian students
- Indian Coast Guard's Dornier was the first to land at the Ibrahim Nasir Airport with **relief and supplies after the tsunami of December 26, 2004.**
- Maldives has pledged its support to India as a permanent

member of an expanded UN Security Council.

- On December 5, 2014, India dispatched “**water aid**” to the Maldivian capital of Male, after a fire destroyed the generator of its biggest water treatment plant.

Maldives growing “closeness” with China

India is uneasy with Maldives’s relationship with China. China was assisting Maldives in some infrastructure and developmental projects, including a bridge between the island in which the airport is located, Hulhumale, and the Capital island, Male. Maldives was also part of China’s Silk Road project, a move that has not gone down well in New Delhi (during previous President’s rule). The President’s Office, has however, repeatedly clarified that China policy does not interfere with or diminish the country’s “special relationship” with India.

GMR Group issue

Relations between India and Maldives came under a strain after Male had terminated the agreement it entered into with GMR in 2010 for the modernization of the Ibrahim Nasir International Airport.

Arrest of ex-President Nasheed in 2015

Maldives’ first democratically elected President from 2008 to 2012 Mohammed Nasheed, was arrested in February 2015 on terror charges. But, with a **new government under President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih** in office, the Maldives appears ready to get its relationship with India back on track.

Relations after the new government

1. Yameen was surprisingly defeated in the September election by pro-India opposition candidate Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, who took over as new president in a ceremony attended by Indian Prime Minister Narendra

Modi. It was Modi's first visit to the Maldives, which is seen as a battleground between India and China as both jostle for influence in the Indian Ocean.

2. With the election of Solih, **the two countries are now confident of renewing their close friendship and cooperation.** During their meeting in the Maldives on Nov. 17, Solih and Modi also agreed on the **importance of maintaining peace and security in the Indian Ocean and being mindful of each other's concerns and aspirations for the stability of the region.**
3. Apart from exploring ways to strengthen the development partnership between both countries, the two sides discussed security and defense matters, including new areas of cooperation during Prime Minister Modi's visit.
4. The Maldives stated its government would be sensitive toward New Delhi's security and strategic concerns.

Its importance to India with respect to Indian Ocean security

1. These above developments (with respect to new government in Maldives) are significant because the Maldives under the previous Abdullah Yameen regime seemed to be slipping into China's orbit. For instance, the Maldives had signed a new law permitting developers to own islands on lease for development for a period of 99 years which is a failed attempt now.
2. With a new government in the island nation, there is much hope in India that New Delhi and Male will be able to undo some of the damage under the previous regime.
3. China has been building roads, bridges, and ports across the Indian Ocean, including the recently-acquired Hambantota port in Sri Lanka as the latter accumulated unsustainable debt. When Modi and Solih reiterated their assurance of being mindful of each other's concerns and not allowing their respective territories to be used for any activity inimical to the other, Thus coming of a new

government in Maldives is a big sigh of relief when it comes to Indian Ocean security

Even though things have turned around for India politically in many of the neighboring countries such as Sri Lanka and the Maldives, New Delhi's ability to match China in providing economic and infrastructural assistance is open to question. While dealing with smaller neighbors, India also needs to become a lot more magnanimous, staying true to its own "**Gujral doctrine**," thus creating greater confidence. India has a great opportunity in the Maldives to demonstrate that it can learn from its previous errors.

Test Yourself: Mould Your Thoughts

Assess the importance of Maldives for India in the context of rising Chinese assertiveness in the region.