

# India-Maldives Policy Brief

Cchavi Vasisht



Vivekananda  
International  
Foundation

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Published in 2021 by

**Vivekananda International Foundation**

3, San Martin Marg | Chanakyapuri | New Delhi - 110021

Tel: 011-24121764 | Fax: 011-66173415

E-mail: [info@vifindia.org](mailto:info@vifindia.org)

Website: [www.vifindia.org](http://www.vifindia.org)

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Cchavi Vasisht is a Research Associate at Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF). She is affiliated to Jawaharlal Nehru University in the Centre for South Asian Studies, School of International Studies, for her PhD research. Her doctoral research focusses on understanding entrepreneurship from a gendered lens in Kathmandu and Rautahat districts of Nepal. She has been awarded the UGC NET Senior Research Fellowship to pursue her research work. She completed Masters of Philosophy from Centre for South Asian Studies, where she understood international surrogacy from the sociological perspective within South-Asia. She completed her Master of Arts in Sociology from the same university.

# India - Maldives Policy Brief

The Maldives has attracted international attention due to the increased importance of the Indian Ocean and the Indo-Pacific region. India-Maldives relations have made immense progress in the past years. The relations have seen significant positive developments, such as signing of the agreement for the Great Male Connectivity Project (GMCP). However, the relations face two major challenges - the presence of Islamic radicalisation and China's increasing economic clout in the country. The brief also discusses Maldives relationship with the United States (US), China, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

## **Geostrategic Importance of the Maldives**

Though India-Maldives do not share land borders, Maldives is strategically important for India as it lies close to the west coast of India. The Maldives comprises of around 1200 islands, and many located beyond the equator stretching deep into the Indian Ocean. At the northern and southern parts lie two crucial sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) - the Gulf of Aden and Gulf of Hormuz in West Asia and the Strait of Malacca in Southeast

Asia. These SLOCs are significant for global maritime trade, and also vital for India. Approximately, 50 per cent of India's external trade and 80 per cent of India's energy imports transit through these SLOCs. The increased maritime activity in the Indian Ocean in the recent years and India's strategic priority to promote peace and stability in the region has increased the engagements between the two countries. In addition, Maldives occupy an essential position in India's vision of 'SAGAR' (Security and Growth for All in the Region).

### **Historical and Cultural Relations**

The Maldives with a hundred percent Sunni Muslim country and religious homogeneity has not faced any discrimination and refugee problems. Indians are the second largest expatriate community in the Maldives, for instance, around 25 per cent of doctors and teachers in the Maldives are Indians. Indian archaeological experts from National Research Laboratory for Conservation of Cultural Property (NRLCCP) have restored three historical mosques (Friday Mosque and Dharumavantha Rasgefaanu Mosque - Male, Fenfushi Mosque - South Ari Atoll) in the Maldives. The two countries regularly exchange cultural troupes. The Indian Bollywood films, TV serials and music are popular in the Maldives. In 2011, the Indian Cultural Centre (ICC) was inaugurated in Male, which conducts yoga, classical music and dance courses.

The tourism sector has achieved significant attention from the Indian side. In 2018, a Bilateral Agreement on the Facilitation of Visa arrangements was signed. Further in 2019, a Bilateral Agreement on Exemption from Visa requirement for Diplomatic and Official Passport holders was signed. During the COVID-19 times, there was a decline in tourist arrivals from India. However, in 2021, the tourist influx from India made it as the number one tourist-source market. India resumed regular flights with the Maldives under the Air Travel Bubble established in August 2020. Maldivian Foreign Minister Shahid appreciated the establishment of the Air Travel Bubble

with over 45 flights operating per week and reaching seven destinations in India. This has enabled the travel of Maldivian citizens to India for medical treatment and has also enabled Indian tourists to visit the Maldives. It is understood that people-to-people contact is the backbone of the India-Maldives bilateral relationship.

## **Diplomatic Cooperation**

The two countries do not share any colonial legacy and in the present times too, Maldives does not impact India's domestic politics (unlike other South Asian countries). India was among the first to recognise Maldives independence in 1965 and established diplomatic relations. India established resident High Commissioner in 1980. The Maldives opened a full-fledged High Commission in New Delhi in November 2004.

One of the biggest advantages of creating positive relations with the Maldives is that the bilateral relations are free of any politically contentious issues. Historically, a boundary issue had risen in 1976; it was resolved by the Maritime Boundary Treaty, whereby the Maldives recognised Minicoy as an integral part of India. New Delhi has been an active participant in providing support during the political crisis. India provided assistance during the 1988 coup attempt and launched Operation Cactus. In the 30 years of President Abdul Gayoom's rule (1978-2008), the Maldives occupied a strategically important place. Nevertheless, the problems across Sri Lanka, Pakistan and North East India received more attention. In the later part of 2013, when President Yameen came to rule, India faced tough times and a downturn in bilateral relationship as China made deep inroads into the Maldives.

Nevertheless, the relations between the two countries have been cordial, close and multi-dimensional. The situation improved after Maldives Democratic Party (MDP) came to power in 2018 and Ibrahim Mohamed Solih became the President. The change of government in the Maldives allowed both

countries to redefine bilateral relationship, as indicated by high-level visits. Indian Prime Minister Modi was the first and the only serving head of government at President Solih's inauguration in September 2018. This was followed by the visit of President Solih to India in December 2018. India announced an economic package of about one billion dollars and started capacity building programmes.

The significance of the relations is visible in the successful implementation of various projects. Contrary to the much-hyped media perception, India delivered on its promises. For example, India provided training to the Maldivian delegation of customs personnel, parliamentarians, election commissioners, and civil servants. The details of major infrastructure and development projects are discussed later.

Despite the positive achievements, negative perceptions are sometimes hyped against India. The hashtag "India Out" was trending on Twitter around the Maldives' Independence Day celebrations in 2021. This anti-India sentiment was first created during Yameen's regime in 2013. The controversy was over the delivery of two Dhruv Advanced Light Helicopters (ALH) in 2010 and 2015. The issue was set to rest when Ibrahim Solih took over as President, but it was raised again in 2020. The recent campaign is led by Yameen against India's developmental funding for creating physical, social and community infrastructure. The voices were raised since President Solih's government decided to retain two India-gifted helicopters and their operational military personnel. The opposition has been criticising India and the Maldivian government for the continued presence of Indian military officials to operate these aircrafts in the Maldives. The Maldivian government has previously said that the Indian military has been staying due to a lack of trained Maldivian staff that can operate them.

The year 2021 has marked a significant milestone in India-Maldives bilateral relations. Indian External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar visited the Maldives in February 2021, marking the celebrations of the

55th anniversary since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Maldives and India. Both the Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to further deepening and strengthening the relationship. In the past two years, India-Maldives relations have been transformed into a profound partnership. The visit was followed by the Maldives Foreign Minister's visit to India in July 2021. The Indian Prime Minister felicitated the President-elect on his Vision Statement for a Presidency of Hope and assured him of India's full support and cooperation during his presidency. In addition, the two Ministers emphasised the importance of an effective multilateral system to tackle global challenges and highlighted the need to pursue reforms in the UN General Assembly and the Security Council.

Furthermore, the Maldives reassured India of its support for permanent membership of a reformed UNSC. India also reiterated its support for the Maldives presidency of the 76th UNGA session. Both countries agreed to work towards the threat of climate change in the upcoming 26th session of the Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC to be held November 2021. The Indian Prime Minister's 'Neighbourhood First' policy echoes Maldivian President Solih's 'India First' foreign policy. The Maldives also occupies a prominent place in India's SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision.

## **Economic Relations**

In 1981, India and Maldives signed a trade agreement. India-Maldives bilateral trade now stands at USD 290.27million with the trade balance favouring India in September 2020. Indian imports from the Maldives primarily comprise scrap metals. While Indian exports to the Maldives include various engineering and industrial products like drugs and medicines, radar apparatus, rock boulders, aggregates, cement and agriculture products like rice, spices, fruits, vegetables, poultry etc.



### India's Export, Import and Trade Balance

Year	India's Exports	India's Imports	Total Trade	India's Balance of Trade
2015	225.82	3.00	228.82	222.81
2016	274.55	1.55	276.10	273.00
2017	282.04	4.12	286.16	277.93
2018	286.13	3.01	289.14	283.12
2019	290.27	3.42	293.69	286.85
2020 (Jan-Feb)	52.18	0.5	52.68	51.68

Source: <https://hci.gov.in/male/?2600?000>

Maldives have been promoting Foreign Direct Investments either through the automatic or government route and making amendments in its policy, for instance, allowing foreigners to own land by investing USD 1 billion. Further, the Maldivian Constitution was amended in 2015, which allowed foreigners to own land, including investments of over USD 1 billion for projects where 70 per cent of the land has been reclaimed. Nevertheless, India's Foreign Direct Investment to the Maldives witnessed a slight decline in 2018 compared to 2017.

A Currency Swap Agreement was signed in 2019 between Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and Maldives Monetary Authority (MMA). The agreement allows MMA to draw a swap facility to a maximum of USD 400 million and has been extended until July 2021. In addition, the RuPay card services were launched with the signing of the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) and the Bank of Maldives (BML).

India has also provided a budgetary support of USD 50 million grant in two installments in 2018 and 2019. In addition, the State Bank of India invested USD 150 million in the Government of Maldives Treasury Bills in 2019. The State Bank of India established its first branch in 1974 and introduced

modern banking in the island. The Bank has also been instrumental in the social and economic development of the country by giving loan assistance to the housing sector, export of marine products, fisheries sector, aviation sector, promotion of island resorts, and business enterprises.

Export-Import Bank of India extended a Line of Credit of USD 40 million to the Maldives for financing for the development of sports infrastructure. The LOC Agreement to this effect was signed in Maldives in 2021. Furthermore, EXIM Bank has extended five Lines of Credit, amounting to USD 1.33 billion to the Maldives in 2021. The projects included are Greater Male Connectivity Project, housing project, Addu Development Project, Gulhifalhu Port Project, International Cricket Stadium, water and sewerage projects, defence projects, Hanimaadhoo Airport Project, Road Construction Projects and so on.

## **Infrastructure Development Cooperation**

The visibility of Indian projects has increased in the Maldivian citizens' minds. India has prioritised Maldivian infrastructure and development needs. Currently, two projects have received immediate attention - the water and sanitation project and roads and reclamation. The water and sanitation projects exist across 34 islands of the country. The contract for the construction of Roads in Addu has been finalised. India has also initiated projects on sports infrastructures, such as cricket stadium at Hulhumalé and open-air gyms, expanding Hanimadhoo airport, developing the Gulifalhu Port, building cancer hospital, LED lighting assistance and so on.

Way back in 1995, India started focussing on the health sector, developed an Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital and helped in its renovation at the cost of INR 52 crore in 2017. During the COVID-19 crises as well, India gave support and medical help to the Maldives. The education sector, too, received India's attention. The Maldives Institute of Technical Education (now called the Maldives Polytechnic) was set up in 1996. Similarly, India also supported the development of skills and set up training institutes. The

foundation for India-Maldives Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Studies was laid by Indian PM Vajpayee and Maldivian President Gayoom in 2002. The faculty for the same was officially handed over to the Maldives in 2014. Under a grant of USD 33 million, India is building a Police Academy in Addu city named National College for Policing and Law Enforcement (NCPLE). Despite COVID-19, the project has made significant progress. Further discussions are ongoing for institutionalising linkages between police organisations to enhance cooperation in training management and exchange of trainers and trainees.

Similarly, India has offered grants under multiple programmes, such as INR 50 crore grants for bilateral projects and INR 40 crore for High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs). To fulfill socio-economic development, in 2018, the Indian government announced a USD 1.4 billion financial package in the form of budgetary support (USD 50 million), buying of treasury bills (USD 150 million), a currency swap (USD 400 million) and concessional Line of Credit (USD 800 million). In 2019, a USD 800 million Credit Line Agreement was signed between the Ministry of Finance, GoM and EXIM Bank of India.

MoUs were also signed on sustainable urban development. The two parties also signed a cooperation agreement between Public Service Media and Prasar Bharati. In addition, a Letter of Intent between Fahi Dhiriulhun Corporation and EXIM Bank was also signed towards extending a credit facility under EXIM Bank's Buyer's Credit scheme to support the design and construction of 2000 social housing units in Hulhumalé.

One of the biggest infrastructure connectivity projects - Greater Male Connectivity Project was approved. India is providing USD 400 million and a grant of USD 100 million. This project aims to connect Male to Villingili, Gulhifalhu and Thilafushi islands through bridges, causeways and roads. The project is crucial for the proposed Gulhifalhu Port and will be a major catalyst for the Maldivian economy, connecting Male with Villingili, the new commercial port at Gulhifalhu and the industrial zone at Thilafushi.

Further, India is developing Hanimaadhoo Airport and Addu Gan Airport through the USD 800 million Line of Credit. The details of all the projects since the Presidency of the Solih government in the Maldives are given below in the chart:

Year of grant or commitment period	Indian aid and investment cooperation programmes in the Maldives	Type of cooperation (financial, economic, social, defence, security, strategic)
2018	<b>US\$1.4 billion financial assistance package</b>	Financial and economic cooperation
	<i>US\$150 million buying of treasury bills</i>	Financial cooperation
	<i>US\$400 million currency swap arrangement</i>	
	<i>US\$50 million budgetary support.</i>	Financial and economic cooperation
	<i>US\$800 million concessional line of credit facility.</i>	Economic cooperation
	<b>US\$500 million bridge building project.</b>	Economic and social cooperation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>US\$100 million Greater Malé Connectivity Project (grant).</i></li> <li><i>US\$400 million government loan.</i></li> </ul>	Economic and social cooperation
2018-2023	<b>1000 Education Scholarships</b>	Social cooperation
2019	Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on cooperation in the field of hydrography.	Maritime navigation cooperation
	MoU on cooperation in the field of health.	Health cooperation
	MoU on establishment of passenger-cum-cargo service by sea.	Shipping cooperation
	MoU for cooperation in customs capacity building.	Ports development cooperation
	MoU between Maldives Civil Service Commission and NCGG, Mussoorie.	Civil service development cooperation
	Technical Agreement on exchange of White Shipping Information between Indian Navy (IN) and Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF).	Maritime and defence cooperation
	Finalising draft MoU on addressing manpower requirement at IGMH.	Health cooperation
2019-2021	US\$33 million Police Academy of Maldives building project.	Police and security cooperation
2019	18 projects have been finalised under the INR 50 Cr grant and 9 high impact community development projects are being implemented under the INR 40 Cr grant.	Financial and economic cooperation
	Construction of Composite Training Centre for MNDF (Avas, 2020), Coastal Radar Surveillance System and of new Ministry of Defence Headquarters.	Defence cooperation
2020	14-member Rapid Response Medical team.	COVID-19 aid cooperation
	Donation of essential medicines.	COVID-19 aid cooperation
	6.2 tonnes of essential medical supplies.	COVID-19 aid cooperation
	A currency swap of USD 150 million was approved by RBI in April 2020 to help Maldives tide over COVID-19 inflicted economic crisis.	COVID-19 aid cooperation
	US\$ 250 million financial assistance.	COVID-19 aid cooperation

## Disaster Management Cooperation

India was the first to assist the Maldives during the 2004 Tsunami and the water crisis in Malé in December 2014. Under Operation NEER, India sent bottled drinking water to Malé. Indian Coast Guard previously provided

pollution dispersant and oil spill control equipment to MNDF Coast Guard. India also offered customised training for MNDF Fire and Rescue Service in India.

During the COVID-19 crisis, a 14 member Rapid Response Medical team from AFMS was deployed in the Maldives to guide and train the Maldivian authorities and personnel. India launched Operation Sanjeevani to send medical supplies to the Maldives and various other countries. The Maldives was the first country in South Asia to receive vaccines from India after 96 hours of launching its vaccination drive. An additional 100,000 doses of the Covishield vaccines were delivered after 100,000 doses were gifted to the Maldives in January 2021. To address the economic crises, a currency swap of USD 150 million was approved by RBI in April 2020 to help Maldives to address the economic crises.

## **Security and Defence Cooperation**

India has also granted technical support, provided naval or maritime vessels and installed coastal surveillance systems in Maldivian territories. In order to enhance regional maritime security, India gifted a patrol vessel named KAAMIYAB to the Maldives in 2019. In addition, the Indian High Commissioner to Maldives Sunjay Sudhir said India has been training pilots for helicopters and the Dornier aircrafts gifted to the Maldives. The advanced light helicopters and Dornier aircrafts were provided upon Maldivian government's request to enhance the Maldivian army's capabilities.

To enhance maritime cooperation, NSA-level talks were initiated in 2011. The first NSA level talks were hosted by Maldives. The second NSA-level Trilateral Meeting was held by Sri Lanka in 2013. The three sides discussed a wide range of topics, including sharing of Automatic Identification System (AIS) data, enhancing cooperation in Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA), and strengthening coordination of maritime Search and Rescue (SAR), expanding bilateral exercises DOSTI (friendship) and many more.

The third NSA level talks were hosted by India in 2014. Within that, the initiatives to enhance Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA), such as Long Range Identification and Tracking (LRIT) services, training and capacity building initiatives in areas of MDA, Search and Rescue, and Oil Pollution Response, maintaining lines of communication, formation of marine oil pollution response contingency plans and cooperation in legal and policy issues related to piracy were discussed.

In 2020, the fourth NSA level talks were hosted by Sri Lanka, after a gap of six years. The key aspects highlighted were to broaden the scope from “maritime security to maritime and security”. The meeting also recognised threats from radicalisation, extremism, terrorism, money laundering, arms and drug trafficking. The Ministers also agreed to convene a meeting of the Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism, countering Violent Extremism and De-radicalisation. Following this, 08 April 2021, the First Meeting of the Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism, Countering Violent Extremism and De-Radicalisation between India and the Maldives was hosted by India. The two sides also discussed the challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, countering terrorism, radicalisation and violent extremism.

Furthermore, to facilitate Maldives maritime capabilities, India has signed a USD 50 million line of credit (LoC) agreement in 2021. India has also signed an agreement with Male to “develop, support and maintain” Maldivian National Defence Force Coast Guard Harbour at Sifvaru (Uthuru Thilafalhu). Furthermore, on the occasion of World Maritime Day, India and Maldives signed an agreement on enhancing marine security and environment protection titled “Augmenting Marine Safety, Security and Environment Protection in the Region through the Cooperation in the Long-Range Identification and Tracking of Ships System”. The LRIT system provides global identification and tracking of ships to strengthen the security of shipping and marine environment protection. This is to enhance the capability of the Defence Forces of the Maldives in exercising

jurisdiction and undertaking maritime surveillance of its EEZ and islands. Other major initiatives in the defence sector include Composite Training Centre for MNDF, Coastal Radar Surveillance System and construction of a new Ministry of Defence Headquarters in the Maldives.

Nevertheless, bilateral relations face two major challenges - the problem of Islamist radicalisation and the rising interference of China in the South Asian region. The political instability and socio-economic uncertainty are the main drivers fuelling the rise of Islamist radicalism in the country. Idara Khidmat-e-Khalq, the LeT front organisation, has established its hold in the southern parts of the Maldives. Events in other parts of the world, especially Afghanistan and Pakistan, influenced Maldivian radicalisation. Given the political instability in Afghanistan in 2021, the potential for Islamic radicalisation has increased.

On the other hand, China has been vying in the Indian Ocean region and South Asian countries. During Yameen's regime, China made inroads in the nation and Maldives became part of the 'pearl' in China's "String of Pearls" construct in South Asia. China has been developing infrastructural projects in the country in a manner that increases Male's economic dependence on Beijing. This is being done to ultimately make the country as a maritime base with the primary aim to secure its sea lanes. The details of Chinese projects are discussed in the latter part of the brief.

## **Maldives - United States Relations**

The US established diplomatic relations with the Maldives in 1966, and operates an American Center in Male (the country does not have a consulate or embassy in the Maldives, and the US Ambassador and Embassy staff in Sri Lanka are accredited to the Maldives). Similarly, there is no Maldives Embassy in Washington. The US has supported Maldives' democratic initiatives, economic development, maritime security, law enforcement and social and environmental ambitions. A total of USD 20 million in assistance has been provided to the Maldives since 2001.

Through its PRIME (Promoting Resilience in the Maldives) activity, USAID supports the country in increasing the resilience of vulnerable populations and at-risk groups. And, the SIMD (Strong & Inclusive Maldivian Democracy) activity works to strengthen the capacity and resilience of democratic institutions. In addition, considering the importance of the Indian Ocean region, the US naval vessels have regularly called the Maldives in recent years. Furthermore, in support of Maldives maritime security, the US has provided USD 10.8 million in Foreign Military Financing under the Bay of Bengal Initiative since 2018.

During the COVID-19 crisis, the US provided nearly USD 3 million in assistance to the Maldives to expand social protection services. On the other hand, Maldives extends support to US efforts to combat terrorism and terrorist financing. The Maldives signed a trade and investment framework agreement (TIFA) with the United States and held its first meeting in October 2014. However, the US does not have a bilateral investment treaty with the Maldives. While Maldives welcomes foreign investment its codified laws are ambiguous. Therefore, the US investment in the Maldives thus far has been limited. The current investments have largely focussed on the tourism sector, particularly hotel franchising and air transportation.

## **Maldives - China Relations**

China-Maldives established diplomatic relations in 1972. In 2021, China-Maldives concluded the seventh round of diplomatic relations. China appreciates Maldives efforts for promoting peace and development under the UN. China also recognises Maldives' support to tackle global challenges by enhancing multilateralism. And, Maldives appreciates China's efforts for multilateralism and economic globalisation. Furthermore, the Maldives supports China's claim on Taiwan and recognises that Taiwan is an inalienable part of the territory of China.

The two countries signed Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation in 2004 and the bilateral free trade agreement in 2017. The negotiations



on a FTA with Hong Kong have also been completed; however, it has not been signed yet. Due to China's growing economic and maritime interests in the Indian Ocean Region, China has shown keen interest in developing economic infrastructure in the Maldives. In 2014, Maldives agreed to become a partner in China's Maritime Silk Route.

China has provided grant and loan assistance to the Maldives to build a bridge between the Male and the Maldives airport, called the China-Maldives friendship bridge. Recently, projects have been initiated in the Ihavandhoo, Marao and Maarandhoo Islands. However, the Maldives' reliance on China to develop more than USD 2.5 billion in infrastructure projects and the resulting accumulation of foreign debt— 40 per cent of the country's GDP in 2017— is a concern. The Maldives debt payment to China alone is close to USD 3.4 billion.

During the COVID-19 crisis, the Chinese government offered assistance, provided medical supplies and equipment, shared experience and helped improve the testing capacity of Maldives. And on the other hand, Maldives assisted the stranded Chinese tourists and the Chinese personnel engaged in the projects of the Belt and Road Initiative in the Maldives. The Maldives donated 1 million cans of tuna fish to China.

### **Maldives - Pakistan Relations**

The two countries share historical relations based on goodwill and Islamic brotherhood. On the 52nd Independence Day of Maldives (2017), the leaders of the two countries agreed to strengthen the Muslim Ummah solidarity and internationally promote the values of Islam. Several agreements have been signed focussing on enhancing cooperation in trade, education, tourism, climate change, and building capacities of civil servants and diplomats. And to oversee the implementation of the agreements Joint Working Committees were constituted.

The Maldives have also shown concerns over the repetitive escalation of tension between India and Pakistan. The Maldives condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, as was recently done at the UNGA. In another move, Maldives also thwarted Pakistan's effort to constitute an informal group of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation envoys at the UN on Islamophobia. This was done on the pretext that India was being singled out, which could, therefore, be detrimental to religious harmony in South Asia. Due to such assertions, Pakistan re-emphasised the need for stronger ties with the Maldives.

### **Maldives - Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka had established diplomatic relations on the day of the Maldives independence. The two countries shared trade relations even before the independence. In 1906, the Maldives established its first Representative Office in Colombo. Post independence, the Maldives – Sri Lanka Joint Commission was established in 1984 under the Agreement on Economic and Technical Co-operation. In the recent past, the two countries have expanded their scope of cooperation in the field of education, tourism, culture, fisheries, health, youth and skills development, sports, legal and law enforcement, and cooperation at regional and international fora.

In 2016, Sri Lanka had a trade surplus of USD 16 million with the Maldives. Despite the trade deficit, Sri Lanka is the second-largest market for Maldivian exports, thereby making it an important partner. The two countries share an economic interest in boosting tourism and must further cooperate in this sphere. And also look into the environmental impacts on the Indian Ocean and promote sustainable development.

The two countries also share military and defence relations, and Sri Lanka also assists in building the capacity of security personnel of the Maldives National Defence Force. Moreover, Sri Lanka and the Maldives are important partners of NSA level talks along with India to promote and preserve the security and interests of the Indian Ocean, as discussed above.

## To Conclude

Maldives' geostrategic location in the Indian Ocean region makes it a significant hub of SLOCs in the Indian Ocean. The location provides the country with an advantageous position in foreign policy decisions with the shift in the concentration of power in the Indian Ocean region. The West, especially the US, is making specific inroads in the Indo-Pacific region, and the Maldives is an important component of it. The US provides aid and assistance for capacity building, and maritime security which is a significant concern. China, with its rising ambitions, has been making inroads in the South Asian region with the One Belt One Road Initiative. The Maldives joined the initiative in 2014 and has received grant and loan assistance from the Chinese government making it overly vulnerable to China's debt trap diplomacy. Pakistan is part of the brief to highlight the connection between the two countries and how the incidence of Islamic radicalism in Maldives is being influenced by environment in Pakistan. The Maldives have raised voices against any terrorist-related activities and with its UNGA presidency in 2021, it is hoped that it will raise these concerns at the UN more emphatically. The relations between Sri Lanka and the Maldives are strengthened because of the maritime cooperation initiatives along with India.

India is an important player in the Maldives international and diplomatic sphere. With a small setback during the Yameen regime, the relations have settled with the Solih government in power. The two countries have shared economic, social, diplomatic and defence relations. With an extensive review of relations, it can be concluded that buying economic relations and maritime security is a critical concern for India. As India stepped up its position in the tourism sector in Sri Lanka, it is hoped that soon Indians will be contributing the highest inflow of tourists to the Maldives. Maritime security is one of the strategic interests for India for its security and position in its backyard, i.e., Indian Ocean region. To counter the external forces, India must continue its relations with the Maldives with much vigour and

support to develop the country as well as its presence in the country.

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### **VIVEKANANDA INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION**

3, San Martin Marg, Chanakyapuri, New Delhi – 110021

Phone: +91-11-24121764, 24106698

Email: [info@vifindia.org](mailto:info@vifindia.org),

Website: <https://www.vifindia.org>

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