

Maldives Coastal Radars: RSTV – India's World

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Guest:

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Larger Background:

- Since '26/11' the Government of India has taken a number of measures to strengthen coastal, offshore and maritime security.
- Broadly, these measures include:
 1. Capacity augmentation of maritime security agencies for surveillance and patrol of the nation's maritime zones;
 2. Enhanced technical surveillance of coastal and offshore areas;
 3. Establishment of mechanisms for inter-agency coordination;
 4. Increased regulation of activities in the maritime zones; as also integration of the fishing and coastal communities.

Besides, State-wise Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for coordination among various agencies on coastal security issues have also been formulated.

Coastal Security Exercises are being conducted regularly by Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard to assess the effectiveness of existing mechanisms and to address gaps.

Recent Steps taken in augmenting Electronic Surveillance:

- Electronic surveillance mechanism has been augmented by provisioning of an electronic / radar chain called Coastal Surveillance Network (CSN) comprising of Chain of Static Sensors having radar, Automatic Identification System (AIS), Long Range Identification and Tracking (LRIT), day / night cameras, communication systems.
- These measures assist in developing Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) through interconnecting 51 Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard stations, which has been established to develop a **Common Operational Picture**.
- Vessel Traffic Management System (VTMS) radars in ports also facilitate surveillance of port areas.
- The Indian Navy, Indian Coast Guard and State Marine Police, as a three tiered cover, along with other agencies such as Customs and Port Trusts, patrol the Maritime Zones of India, islands and adjacent seas, using ships and aircraft to detect and check infiltration through the sea-routes.

Introductory Points:

- In this episode of India's World we will analyse the installation of India's radar system in the Maldives and the Indian Ocean Region.
- Six months after the ousting of the Maldives' "pro-China" President Abdulla Yameen, India has resumed its work of installing a chain of radars on the islands that will link up with the existing naval radar chain in India to provide a live feed.
- The islands of Maldives located some 700 km south-west of Kerala is an important part of the seagoing traffic monitoring system that India is building.

- India is to set up 10 coastal surveillance radars made by the public sector giant, Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL).
- Currently, phase-II of the coastal surveillance radar project is underway during which seven radar stations are being installed and three existing radar stations of phase-I are being upgraded.
- India is setting up the “chain of radars” to link it up with the 46 coastal surveillance radars installed all along its 7,519 km coast. Sri Lanka will host six radars, Mauritius eight, Seychelles will have one and Maldives will have 10.
- These will present comprehensive live-feeds of ship movements in the Indian Ocean Region. This feed will then be used by the Indian Navy, and its allies.
- On this edition of India’s world, we will analyze India’s radar system in the Maldives and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

Analysis by the Experts:

- After 26/11, we realized that our coastal surveillance required a lot of tweaking up. The first set of 46 radars were approved.
- All those radars are now in place along the Indian coastline.
- Subsequently, there is a fusion centre where all the pictures get into a big database. The feed also comes from our aircraft, our ships and submarines which are patrolling in various parts of the Indian Ocean.
- All this feed is synthesized together in the fusion centre and it is passed on to the commands which take action in case there is a requirement to intervene.
- We have also had an agreement with countries such as Sri Lanka, Maldives, Seychelles and Mauritius. We are very close to these countries as far as ocean geography goes.
- Therefore, if there is a target that is found to be an enemy target, then India would need to know about it and so would her allies.
- As a net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), India thought that it was necessary to get these countries on board.
- With the recent development of the installation of India’s radar system in the Maldives and the Indian Ocean Region, India would have a very good maritime domain awareness, in the entire Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- India would be better informed and better prepared. Hopefully, this would help us prepare another 26/11 type attack.

Change in India-Maldives Relations: An Enabling Factor

1. Political Change in Maldives:

- The restarting of the radar system programme in the Maldives, shows how dramatically, a change of Government in any of our neighbouring countries, can bring about a sea change in their policy towards India.
- The radar system had been stalled because of the policy of the Abdullah Yameen Government.
- He had bent over backwards to accommodate the Chinese, while crushing democracy at home.
- He had also paid scant regard to India’s concerns even to the extent that he had placed visa restrictions on Indian passport holders. He had put curbs on the meeting of Indian diplomats with the officials of the Maldives, and demanded that the Indian helicopters and their crew be taken out of the Maldives. So, he had taken things to a ridiculous extreme.
- The crushing blow which he suffered in the last 6 months during the election process shows how the people of the Maldives were disenchanted with him.
- He lost in the September 2018 election to President Solih and recently; his party was routed in the Parliamentary elections, and the Maldivian Democratic Party got 76% of the seats.
- So, it shows how policies needed to be changed and the fact that this was amply recognized by the

Maldivian people was evident from the outcome of the results.

(b) Efforts Made by President Solih and Prime Minister Modi

- Since his election, President Solih has tried to put things back on track.
- He has visited India in December 2018 and stated very clearly that he wants a very close relationship with India and has indicated that he would pay full regard to our security concerns, which is why the Maldivian Defence Minister who like our own Defence Minister is a lady, visited India, making it amply clear that the Maldives were going to be fully cognizant of India's security needs and its requirements.
- India on its part has pledged development assistance which is intended to take Maldives out of the **debt trap**, in which they were finding themselves.
- At the same time, it is important to point out that the setting up of the "**Coastal Radar Surveillance System**", indicates how Prime Minister Modi's Government has been pursuing a policy of challenging China's growing role in our region.
- In September 2015, Prime Minister Modi visited Sri Lanka; he also visited the Maldives and Seychelles. He promoted the policy of **Security and Growth for all in the region (SAGAR)**.
- The **Coastal Radar Surveillance System** is an integral part of that policy. However, the Maldives had held back. India was able to install 6 Coastal Radars in Sri Lanka. India was able to install 8 in Mauritius, and 1 in Seychelles. But Abdullah Yameen decided to hold back from this initiative of India.
- It is now that this is going to be corrected, because if the 10 radars are in place, then India's ability to monitor the traffic of ships in the Indian Ocean Region would be given a boost.
- This is fundamental for India's security because India's coastline is very vast- it is around 7519 kilometers.
- Further, the Mumbai terror attack was carried out by sea, and this enhanced surveillance system would be able to monitor the movement of even small boats. So, incidents like the Mumbai terror attack can be prevented.
- In addition, China's project of the One Belt, One Road (OBOR), has been impacting India's security. China has setup projects in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. However, these countries have begun to have second thoughts.
- Pakistan has found itself in a big debt trap. Whereas, Sri Lanka had to put out the Hambantota port on a lease to China to pay back the money that it owed.
- Thus, India has been emerging as another alternative. As an alternative model.
- In that sense, the recognition of the Maldives of the importance and value of India, in their development, stands out and their decision, to restart the project of putting the coastal surveillance radars in the Maldives is very significant.

The Radar System: A Help to India and the Maldives

- The project evolved primarily looking at the non-state threat that India was facing in the maritime domain.
- However, it has grown into a project that is now about the larger issues of structural change in the region; it is about **maritime domain awareness**, and it is about the potential role that India can play in the Indian ocean region.
- If we bring all of this together, we get a picture of an India that is trying to emerge as a net-security provider in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- It is also important to look at some of the island nations around India's periphery as important partners in this endeavor.
- The Indian Ocean Region is becoming extremely contested, and it is very important for India, being a pivotal power in the region, to have a kind of maritime domain awareness that would allow it to safeguard its interests.
- There is a space that emerges where India's role as a pre-eminent power in the region is important

not only for itself but also for the smaller countries in the region.

- The recent developments allow India to project itself as a benign actor in the region and as an actor that is a responsible stakeholder in managing the sea lanes of communication.
- Further, other states in the region are recognizing India's importance and its role as a benign actor. Perhaps as a partnership with these actors, there is much that can be done.

An Eye on China?

- If you look at the Indian State and its bilateral agreements with countries in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), it is only now that these agreements are being put into full force.
- India always thought that it had a fair amount of independence operating in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), however, now, this notion of independence is being challenged by an emergent China.
- The agreement with the Maldives was signed on the 11th of June, 2018.
- Mr. Yameen was still the president at that time. However, it was not acted upon. It caters for the development of ports, participating in supplying equipment, weapons and maybe them participating in flagship initiatives like the Make in India campaign as well.
- Thus, it is a larger bilateral relationship. China is not going to keep idle. One can expect Chinese action in the Maldives because with this initiative, they have been taken aback. This recent development would be a big shock to the Chinese. The extent of the radar stations range from 5 degrees above the equator to about 2 degrees below the equator.
- India already has agreements with France, Japan and the U.S., and they would be particularly happy with this recent development. They would be quite satisfied as it also takes care of their maritime security in the region. Also, all of them are democratic countries.

The Players in the Region and what's at stake for them?

- China's policy in the Indian Ocean and Pacific Region, has caused concern to many countries including the United States, Australia, New Zealand, the countries of south-east Asia and Japan. There have been indications by many of these countries to work more closely with India in regard to ensuring everybody's maritime security as well as securing the safety of the maritime routes.

- There are vital sea lanes of communication passing through the Maldives and these sea lanes are of interest to most countries which have trade going through this particular area. By promising an aid package of 1.4 Billion dollars, the Government of India, has indicated that it would do everything possible to help the Maldives to pursue their developmental programmes.

- It is important to note that the Maldives are not pulling away entirely from the Chinese- this is in line with what President Solih has said- mentioning that he would like to strengthen old friendships while developing new ones.

- Further, the spate of terror attacks that Sri Lanka has witnessed recently also raises concerns over a small island nation like the Maldives as well.

- It is there that intelligence sharing with the government of the Maldives would be very important. The coastal radar surveillance system would help not only India, but also, the government of Maldives in this regard.

Change in Dynamics in the Maldives Post the Elections of 2018:

- There is discontent about the way the Chinese operate. China is becoming an important part in the domestic political narrative in these countries. This has been an interesting development over the last few years that we have been seeing.

As a matter of fact, even India has been drawn into the domestic political narrative of its neighbours- such as Nepal, Sri Lanka, etc. and this has not always been beneficial to Indian interests. Now, with the emergence of China and with the way that they have manipulated the economics of these smaller countries, one sees these divisions becoming very sharp. You have pro-China and anti-China parties. This contestation is now becoming a part of the domestic political systems and narratives.

- The sense that smaller states in the Indian Ocean Region and in the wider Indo-Pacific are now operating with a greater degree of urgency and with a sense of agency, that we thought that they did not have earlier, represents a major shift in itself.

- Smaller countries are now taking interests based on pragmatism and what is in their interests.

- When these smaller countries have realized the ills of falling into a debt trap, there has been a corrective in the domestic political system, that sets course. This brings India's role to greater prominence as well. India has always highlighted its intent to be with the smaller states and have reminded them that she isn't interested in controlling their economy. India has made efforts in ensuring that there is a degree of fairness in the way one operates. Further, almost all decisions that India takes in foreign policy are out in the open, whereas, the Chinese modus-operandi is often not clear to most people.

Concluding Remarks:

- The Maldives had the highest density of people joining the Islamic State. There is a large, emergent security concern for India in the Maldives.

- The northernmost island of the Maldives is only 90 nautical miles (162 kilometers) away from the island of Minicoy, which is a part of India. The radar systems that we have installed now would be able to see very long distances and would be able to transfer images; all images would be transported onto satellite systems through which it would be downlinked to the central server. It would be available to all these countries. Search and surveillance can be mounted if there are any suspicious movements.

- China has been developing its string of pearls, which extends right from the mainland of China upto Djibouti. In doing so, the Chinese have also developed some ports in India's neighbourhood, i.e. in Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and the Gwadar Port in Pakistan.

- These certainly do impinge on India's security perceptions.

- With the establishment of the coastal radar surveillance system, India would be able to take care of its concerns, to some extent, and also the concerns of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean.

