

India – Maldives Relations: Notes for UPSC

India-Maldives relations is an important topic from the GS Paper II, International Relations perspective of the UPSC Exam.

Background of India-Maldives relations

India and Maldives share ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious and commercial links steeped in antiquity and enjoy close, cordial and multi-dimensional relations. India was among the first to recognise Maldives after its independence in 1965 and to establish diplomatic relations with the country. India established its mission at the level of CDA in 1972 and resident High Commissioner in 1980. Maldives opened a full-fledged High Commission in New Delhi in November 2004, at that time one of its only four diplomatic missions worldwide.

India-Maldives Political relations

Bilateral relations have been nurtured and strengthened by regular contacts at the highest levels. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations, almost all the Prime Ministers of India have visited the Maldives. Former President Gayoom made a number of visits to India. President Mohamed Nasheed's first visit abroad after assuming office was to India in December 2008. In October 2009, President Nasheed attended the Delhi High Level Conference on Climate Change and Technology Transfer.

In 2010 President Nasheed visited India twice, first in January for the CII-Partnership Summit in Chennai and in October for attending the Opening ceremony of the 19th Commonwealth Games in New Delhi. In the current year, President Nasheed made an official visit in February 2011. On international issues Maldives had consistently supported India in multilateral fora, such as the United Nations, the Commonwealth, the NAM and the SAARC. Maldives was one of the first countries to convey its support for the candidature of Shri Kamalesh Sharma as the Commonwealth Secretary General. Maldives also co-sponsored the G-4 draft resolutions on United Nations reforms.

Bilateral Assistance

Wherever possible, India has been offering assistance to Maldives in its developmental process. The major projects executed by India are:

(i) Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital: (IGMH) During former Prime Minister Shri Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Male' in 1986, it was agreed to establish a medical complex in Male' with Indian assistance. Accordingly, the 200-bed hospital was established at an estimated cost of Rs.42.5 crores and inaugurated in April 1995. IGMH, Male now serves as the most advanced tertiary

care hospital in Maldives and is easily the most visible symbol of India's assistance to the Maldives. Though at present, the Government of Maldives is responsible for managing/running the hospital, the Government of India continues to offer substantial assistance to the institution.

(ii) Faculty of Engineering Technology (FET): Maldives Institute of Technical Education (MITE) was set up as a grant-in-aid project of the Government of India in 1996. Having a capacity to train at least 200 students a year in various technical/vocational disciplines, MITE was renamed as Faculty of Engineering Technology (FET) in order to better reflect the academic programmes conducted by it, is functioning well.

Disaster-relief Assistance

Following the tsunami waves that hit Maldives on the morning of 26 December 2004, India was the first country to rush relief and aid to the Maldives. A Coast Guard Dornier aircraft arrived on the morning of 27th December followed by two Indian Air Force Avros carrying relief materials on the same day. All the aircraft stayed back to continue their relief operations in the Maldives. INS Mysore carrying relief material, facilities for a 20-bed hospital and 2 helicopters arrived on December 28. She was joined by INS Udaygiri and INS Aditya on December 29. The ships operated in the most affected Southern Atolls.

The ships delivered foodstuff & medicines, treated patients in a field hospital set up by their medics, undertook repair of electricity generators & communication equipment and also evacuated patients in the shipborne helicopters when required. The total cost of India's relief operations has been estimated at Rs. 36.39 crores. The Government of India also sanctioned a budget support aid of Rs.10 crores to Maldives in 2005 in response to President Gayoom's request for financial help in view of the serious financial difficulties Maldives was facing on account of the tsunami and related factors.

Economic Assistance

During the visit of President Nasheed to India in December 2008, the Government of India extended a Standby Credit Facility of US\$100 million to Maldives. Again a new Standby Credit Facility of US\$ 100 million was extended to the Government of Maldives during the November 2011 visit of Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohan Singh to Maldives.

Military Assistance

At the crack of dawn in November 1988, speedboats carrying 80 armed militants of the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) landed in Maldives and along with local defector allies who had infiltrated the country, began a coup d'état. The plot, planned in Sri Lanka by the Tamil nationalist group was believed to be an attempt by a Maldivian businessman and politician opposed to the regime of the President of Maldives Maumoon Abdul Gayoom to

gain control while the PLOTE sought a safe haven and base for its activities. Experts believe that this coup was a result of the spillover from the civil war happening in Sri Lanka.

The insurgents took control of the airport in Malé, the national capital, but failed to capture the President of Maldives Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who had fled thanks to aid of his loyal guards. Upon his escape, he asked for military aid from India on 3 November. The then-Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi responded by ordering 1,600 troops to aid the Maldivian government. In a military operation codenamed "Operation Cactus," Indian forces arrived within 12 hours of the request for aid being made, squashed the coup attempt and achieved full control of the country within hours. 19 PLOTE militants were killed and 1 Indian soldier wounded.

India's intervention was endorsed by other nations such as the United States, Soviet Union, United Kingdom and its neighbours Nepal and Bangladesh.

Latest Developments in India-Maldives relations

- In the wake of a drinking water crisis in Malé' on 4 December 2014, following the collapse of the island's only water treatment plant, Maldives urged India for immediate help. India came to the rescue by sending its heavy lift transporters like C-17 Globemaster III, Il-76 carrying bottled water. The navy also sent her ships like INS Sukanya, INS Deepak and others which can produce fresh water using their onboard desalination plants.
- Maldives' first democratically elected President from 2008 to 2012 Mohammed Nasheed, was arrested on 22 February 2015 on terror charges. India and the US expressed concern over Nasheed's arrest and manhandling. Indian PM Modi was to also visit Maldives in the second week of March as a part four nation visit to Indian Ocean neighbours. But, he later omitted Maldives from his tour.

Relevant Questions for India-Maldives Relations

When did Maldives establish diplomatic relations with India?

India was among the first to recognise Maldives after its independence in 1965 and to establish diplomatic relations with the country. India established its mission at Malé in 1972.

What is the Geographic composition of Maldives?

Maldives is a chain of 1192 islands located south-west of Sri Lanka and India in the Indian Ocean. The islands are so tiny that many world maps do not show Maldives. It is an independent country of about 357566 in population.

Which language is spoken in Maldives?

Although the country has several other dialects, which include Mulaku, Huvadhu, Maliku, and Addu, Dhivehi remains the dominant language in the Maldives.

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