



India - Maldives

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Why in News

Recently, India and the Maldives have signed a **defence Line of Credit agreement worth USD 50 million.**

The agreement was **signed during the visit by the External Affairs Minister of India to Maldives.**



Key Points

- **Defence Line of Credit:**
 - It was **signed pursuant to the request by the Government of Maldives in April 2013 for India's support and cooperation** in enhancing the capability of the Maldives Defence Forces in maritime surveillance, and subsequent requests in October 2015 and March 2016.
 - It is seen as key to India's and Maldives' strategic interests, particularly **given China's increasing footprint in the Indian Ocean Region.**

- **Assistance to Build Dockyards:**

- A dockyard will be developed at the **Uthuru Thila Falhu (UTF) Naval Base** with Indian assistance, a few miles northwest of Male, which will strengthen the Maldivian defence capabilities.

The agreement is **part of the defence action plan signed in 2016** by then Maldivian President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom during a visit to India.

- Indicating deepening security cooperation, an agreement to develop, support and maintain a **Maldives National Defence Force Coast Guard Harbour** at Sifavaru was also signed.

India will also support development of other infrastructure needed for the harbour, support the development of communications resources and radar services, and provide training.

- **Countering Terrorism:**

Agreed to convene the first meeting of the Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism, countering Violent Extremism and **De-radicalisation** at the the earliest.

- **Review of Infrastructure Projects:**

A number of India-backed infrastructure projects including the National College of Policing and Law Enforcement Studies.

- **Collaboration at Multilateral Bodies:**

Discussed collaboration at multilateral bodies like the General Assembly and Security Council of the **United Nations Organisation**.

- The Maldivian side **assured India of its support for permanent membership of India** at the “expanded and reformed” UN Security Council.
- **India has also extended support for the candidature of the Maldives** for the Presidency of the 76th session of the General Assembly.

- **Cooperation for Police Reforms:**

Noted progress on institutionalising linkages between the police organisations to support collaboration and cooperation in training management and exchange of trainers and trainees.

India - Maldives Relations

- **Geo-Strategic Importance of Maldives to India:**

- **Maldives, a Toll Gate in Indian Ocean:**

- Located at the southern and northern parts of this island chain lies the two important **sea lanes of communication (SLOCs)**.
 - These SLOCs are critical for maritime trade flow between the Gulf of Aden and Gulf of Hormuz in West Asia and the Strait of Malacca in Southeast Asia.
 - Nearly 50% of India's external trade and 80% of its energy imports transit these SLOCs in the Arabian Sea.

- **Part of Important Groupings:** Besides, Maldives is a member of the **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)** and the **South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC)**.

- **Cooperation Between India & Maldives:**

- **Security Cooperation:** Through the decades, India has rushed emergency assistance to the Maldives, whenever sought.
 - In 1988, when armed mercenaries attempted a coup against President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, India sent paratroopers and Navy vessels and restored the legitimate leadership under **Operation Cactus**.
 - India and Maldives conduct the **joint military exercise 'Ekuverin'**.
 - **Disaster Management:** The 2004 tsunami and the drinking water crisis in Male a decade later were other occasions when India rushed assistance.
 - The Maldives has been one of the biggest beneficiaries of the Covid-19 assistance and **vaccines delivered** by India among India's all of neighbouring countries.
 - When the world supply chains were blocked because of the pandemic, India continued to provide crucial commodities to the Maldives under **Mission SAGAR**.
 - **People To People Contact:** Maldivian students attend educational institutions in India and patients fly here for superspeciality healthcare, aided by **a liberal visa-free regime extended by India**.
 - **Economic Cooperation:** Tourism is the mainstay of Maldivian economy. The country is now a major tourist destination for some Indians and a job destination for others.

Given the geographical limitations imposed on the Maldives, India has exempted the nation from export curbs on essential commodities.

- **Irritants in Relations:**

- **Political Instability:** India's major concern has been the impact of political instability in the neighbourhood on its security and development.
The February 2015 arrest of Maldives' opposition leader Mohamed Nasheed on terrorism charges and the consequent political crisis have posed a real diplomatic test for India's neighbourhood policy.
- **Radicalisation:** In the past decade or so, the number of Maldivians drawn towards terrorist groups like the Islamic State (IS) and Pakistan-based madrassas and jihadist groups has been increasing.
 - Political instability and socio-economic uncertainty are the main drivers fuelling the rise of Islamist radicalism in the island nation.
 - This gives rise to the possibility of Pakistan based terror groups using remote Maldivian islands as a launch pad for terror attacks against India and Indian interests.
- **China Angle:** China's strategic footprint in India's neighbourhood has increased. The Maldives has emerged as an important 'pearl' in China's "**String of Pearls**" construct in South Asia.
 - Given the uncertain dynamics of Sino-Indian relation, China's strategic presence in the Maldives remains a concern.
 - Also, the Maldives have started using the China card to bargain with India.

Way Forward

- India-Maldives defense cooperation will enhance India's capability to monitor Chinese maritime and naval movements along vital sea lanes of communication that run alongside the Maldives.
- In accordance with the "**Neighbourhood First Policy**" of the government, India remains a committed development partner for a stable, prosperous and peaceful Maldives.

Source:TH