



## Maldives' UNGA Presidency

---

 [drishtias.com/printpdf/maldives-unga-presidency](https://drishtias.com/printpdf/maldives-unga-presidency)

### Why in News

---

Recently, the Maldives' Foreign Minister **Abdulla Shahid** was elected the **President of the 76<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly (GA)** for 2021-22.

- The win was **welcomed by India** as Indian diplomats had been helping the Maldives and **India expects close cooperation with Maldives at the UN.**
- However, **the Maldives has made no decision** on opening an **Indian consulate in its southern Addu Atoll** even as the Indian Cabinet cleared a proposal for it.



### Key Points

---

- **President of UNGA:**
  - This is a **post held on an annual basis**, rotated amongst various regional groupings. The **76<sup>th</sup> session (2021-22) is the turn of the Asia-Pacific group.** This is the first time Maldives will be occupying the office of the President of UNGA.
  - Maldives also sees it as a win for the 52-member **Small Island Developing States (SIDS)**, which are battling climate change vulnerability and other developmental challenges.

- **Addu Atoll:**

Addu Atoll, also known as **Seenu Atoll**, is the **southernmost atoll of the Maldives**.

Apart from its **strategic location in the Indian Ocean**, Addu is the second largest city in the archipelago, home to over 30,000 people.

- **India's Stand:**

- India approved the opening of a new consulate in the Maldivian city of Addu, in reflection of the **importance India attaches to its ties with the strategically located island nation**.
- India's decision to expand its diplomatic presence in the Maldives comes amid **China's consistent efforts to increase its influence in the island nation**.
- Also Indian rationale for the consulate was **to help Addu residents with speedy visa services**.

- **Opposition of the Initiative:**

Some Maldivians **see a new consulate with suspicion**, especially on the heels of a USD 33-million **Maldivian police training facility that India is helping build in Addu**.

There is already an Indian Embassy in **Male**.

- **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)**.

## India - Maldives Relations

---

- **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 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. 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.

- **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.
- Also, the **Maldives have started using the China card to bargain with India.**

## **Way Forward**

---

- It is hoped that **India in the UN Security Council and the Maldivian President of the General Assembly will work in tandem** as India pursues its goals for **multilateral reform, and re-energise the dormant process of effecting change in the old power structures in the global body.**
- 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**