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Relations between India and Maldives

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Why is in news? 4th Defence Cooperation Dialogue between India & the Maldives held in Male

India and the Maldives conducted the **4th Defence Cooperation Dialogue (DCD) in Male** on March 19, 2023.

An Indian Ocean archipelago of around 1,192 islands that are strewn across the Equator, Maldives is known for its sandy beaches.

It is a **tourist paradise**. Increasingly, its location near international sea lanes through which much of the world's oil is transported has drawn attention to the archipelago's immense strategic value

The Maldives is one of the world's most **geographically dispersed countries**, and is a 99 per cent water-nation. It is also the **smallest country in Asia** and is categorised as a **Small Island Developing State (SIDS)**.

India and Maldives share **ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious, and commercial links** and enjoy close, cordial, and multi-dimensional relations.

India was among the first to recognize the Maldives after its independence in 1965 and to establish diplomatic relations with the country.

India established its mission in 1972 and resident High Commissioner in 1980. The Maldives opened a fully-fledged High Commission in New Delhi in November 2004, at that time one of its only four diplomatic missions worldwide.

India's relationship with the Maldives is **free of any politically contentious issues**. The one-time claim of Maldives to Minicoy Island was resolved by the **Maritime Boundary Treaty of 1976** between the two countries, whereby the Maldives recognized Minicoy as an integral part of India.

Despite its small size, the Maldives is currently being wooed by a number of developed and developing countries. Because of Strategic Importance of the Geographic Location of the Maldives with respect to **Key International Shipping Lanes (ISLs)**.

India emerged as Maldives' **3rd largest trade partner in 2021**.

Indian imports from the Maldives **primarily comprise scrap metals**.

Indian exports to the Maldives include a **variety of engineering and industrial products** like drugs and pharmaceuticals, radar apparatus, rock boulders, aggregates, cement, and agricultural produce like rice, spices, fruits, vegetables, poultry products, etc.

Tourism is the mainstay of the Maldivian economy. The country is now a major tourist destination for Indians.

It is extremely **important for India's strength in blue economy** through sustainable management and utilisation of marine resources.

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Since 1988, defence and security have been a major area of cooperation between India and the Maldives.

India has adopted a very flexible and accommodating approach to meeting Maldivian requirements for defence training and equipment.

India provides the **largest number of training opportunities** for the Maldivian National Defence Force (MNDF), meeting around 70% of their defence training requirements.

A **comprehensive Action Plan for Defence** was also signed in April 2016 to consolidate defence partnerships.

India-Maldives defence cooperation also extends to the areas of Joint Exercises, Maritime Domain Awareness, gifting of hardware, infrastructure development, etc.

On international issues, Maldives had **consistently supported India in multilateral fora**, such as the UN, the Commonwealth, the NAM, and the SAARC.

India had offered Maldives an **economic recovery package of \$1.4 billion** during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the island nation in December 2018. Subsequently, India also **announced line of credit and currency swap deals** to Maldives.

India is **engaged in developing 45 infrastructure development projects** in Maldives compared to nine by Saudi Arabia, nine by Kuwait, one by The Netherlands, and one each by Pakistan and China, the envoy said.

Greater Malé Connectivity Project in Maldives through a financial package consisting of a grant of \$100 million and a new Line of Credit of \$400 million. This is **going to be the largest civilian infrastructure project** in Maldives, connecting Malé with three neighboring islands with the construction of a bridge-and-causeway link spanning 6.7 km.

India is engaged in **building a road project in southern Maldives, water and sanitation project** across the country and an airport extension project among others.

Series of health and humanitarian assistance provided in 2020 that included donation of 5.5 tons of essential medicines, airlifting of 6.2 tons of medicines by the IAF from various India cities through **Operation Sanjeevani**.

Supply of 580 tons of **food aid under Mission SAGAR by INS Kesari** and deployment of **Rapid Response Medical Team** to assist.

Creation of an Air Travel Bubble to facilitate movement of people from both sides for employment, tourism, medical emergencies etc. Maldives was the first neighboring country with which an air bubble was operationalized.

The Maldives holds strategic importance for India under the **government's 'Neighbourhood First' policy** due to its location in the Indian Ocean.

Even though the India-Maldives relations saw strain during 2012-18, **due to radicalization and pro-china attitude**, the relations are back on better terms again, and this is strategically very important for both the nations.

India-Maldives relations are crucial for peaceful Indo-Pacific regions and its maritime security.