India and Maldives - Recent Developments

What is the issue?

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- Maldives Foreign Minister and its President's special envoy to India, Mohamed Asim visited India.
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- The visit gains significance amidst the recently strained relationship between India and Maldives.
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What was the recent tussle?

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- Maldives recently signed its **Free Trade Agreement with China**.
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- This is Maldives’s first FTA with any country and China’s second FTA with any country in South Asia after Pakistan.
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- The trade pact would open Maldives to Chinese goods and tourists in unprecedented numbers.
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- India was certainly concerned with this, due to the possible increased Chinese military presence in the island nation.
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- The Maldivian President had earlier promised that Maldives would be an integral link in China’s Belt and Road Initiative
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- Besides, the Maldives government recently **suspended three members of a local body.**
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- This was notably on charges of meeting the Indian Ambassador without seeking prior approval.
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- However, responding to these, India articulated its hope that as a friendly neighbour, Maldives would be sensitive to India’s concerns in keeping with

its “India first policy”.
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What are the outcomes of the visit?

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- The visit was aimed at overcoming the “trust deficit” between the two countries and reset the strained relations.
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- Maldives foreign minister reiterated Maldives' **“India first” policy**.
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- The emphasis is an attempt to allay India's concerns over Maldives' growing proximity towards Beijing.
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- It was conveyed that Maldives would stay **sensitive to India’s concerns** over peace and security in the Indian Ocean region.
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- The talks also involved strengthening the bilateral relationship keeping in mind its ‘India first’ policy and our ‘Neighbourhood first’ policy.
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What are the implications?

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- The visit by a foreign minister may have cleared some of the bitterness between the two countries.
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- However, India can certainly not continue to take its predominant power in South Asia for granted.
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- It cannot be indifferent to the developments in the smaller neighbours, as they have wider geopolitical ramifications.
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- Both countries have to learn to deal with each others proximity and acknowledge that there are no alternative but to make amends in ties.
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Source: The Indian Express

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