India-Maldives Bilateral Relations

Why in news?

Given the present situation, India must strengthen ties with the Maldives without taking sides in domestic politics.

How about the picture of India- Maldives relation?

- India and Maldives share ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious and commercial links steeped in antiquity.
- **Diplomacy**- India was among the first to recognize and to establish diplomatic relations with Maldives after its independence in 1965.
- **Strategic significance** - Maldives' proximity to the west coast of India and its situation at the hub of commercial sea-lanes running through Indian Ocean makes it strategically important to India.
- India is being seen as a net security provider and 'India First' has been a stated policy of the Government of Maldives.
- **Political aid** - India's prompt assistance during the 1988 coup attempt, led to development of trust and long-term and friendly bilateral relations with the Maldives.
- **Disaster management** - India was the first to assist Maldives during the 2004 Tsunami as well as the water crisis in Malé in Dec 2014.
- India's rapid and comprehensive assistance to the Maldives since the COVID- 19 pandemic began has further reinforced India's credentials of being the first responder.
- **Security & Defence Cooperation -** A comprehensive Action Plan for Defence was signed in 2016 to consolidate defence partnership.
- India provides the largest number of training opportunities for Maldivian National Defence Force, meeting around 70% of their defence training requirements.
- **Development Cooperation –** The major completed and ongoing development assistance projects executed by India are
    - Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital
    - Maldives Institute of Technical Education (Maldives Polytechnic)
    - India-Maldives Faculty of Hospitality & Tourism Studies
    - Technology Adoption Programme in Education Sector in Maldives
    - National Centre for Police and Law Enforcement (NCPLE)
- **Connectivity** – India assists Maldives in the Greater Male Connectivity Project (GMCP) that aims to ease the pressure of the main capital island of Male for commercial and residential purposes.
- India has aided in commissioning of various projects such as Hanimaadhoo airport, Hulhumale cricket stadium, Gulhifalhu port, etc.
- In 2022, India & Maldives agreed for an open skies arrangement which will further improve connectivity between two countries.
- **Economy and Trade -** India emerged as Maldives' 3rd largest trade partner in 2021.

- Indian imports from the Maldives primarily comprise scrap metals while Indian exports to the Maldives include a variety of engineering and industrial products and agriculture produce**.**
- **Tourism -** In 2022, India continues to be the leading source market for Maldives with a 14.1% market share.
- **Consular Matters -** Indian expatriate community in the Maldives has an approximate strength of 27,000.
- Agreement for transfer of prisoners under the Transfer of Sentenced Persons is also active.

How is the present situation?

- Recently, the former Maldivian President Abdulla Yameen had been convicted by a criminal court for 11 years.
- Mr. Yameen has had a rough relationship with India during his presidential term.
- As opposition leader he has led the "India Out" campaign, and had close links with China.
- Recently, he called for an arson attack on the Indian High Commission in Male.
- The Maldives Constitution disqualifies any candidate convicted of criminal charges and sentenced to a term of more than a year unless they are later acquitted or a three-year period has elapsed since their release.

What lies ahead for New Delhi?

- Mr. Yameen's disqualification may provide some relief to New Delhi but it must keep a close watch on other parts of Maldivian politics.
- New Delhi must also actively project the image of the friendly and helpful neighbor.

References

1. The Hindu | On India-Maldives bilateral relations
2. HCI | India-Maldives bilateral relations

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