India-Maldives - Dispute with Elections

What is the issue?

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- Maldives Foreign Secretary has summoned Indian High Commissioner to Maldives and conveyed Male's "displeasure".
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- It comes as the latest sign of a lack of trust that has developed between India and Maldives over the last few years.
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What is the recent happening?

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- The reason for expression of dissatisfaction was a tweet by BJP's Rajya Sabha MP Subramanian Swamy.
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- He said India should invade Maldives if rigging of election takes place.
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- The tweet included a link to a Maldivian news report.
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- It related to the meeting between him and exiled former Maldives President Mohamed Nasheed.
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- India's Ministry of External Affairs has clarified that it was his personal opinion.
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- The Ministry also made it clear that it did not reflect Indian government's views.
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Why was India-Maldives relationship strained?

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- Suspicion on India's role has intensified after India expressed concern over Maldives elections.
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- Maldives announced of elections without allowing democratic institutions.
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- The Parliament and the judiciary were kept away from working in a free and transparent manner.
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- Relations are soured, especially since President Yameen declared emergency for 45 days despite Delhi’s call for restraint.
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- Notably, the exiled President Nasheed had sought India’s military intervention to release dissidents in prison.
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- He called on for India to send an envoy, backed by its military, to free the judges and political detainees.
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- **Democracy** - The Maldivian election is due in September, 2018.
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- India has constantly urged Maldives to restore democracy.
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- It has also demanded a “credible restoration” of political process and the rule of law before the elections are conducted.
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- Given this, Swamy’s tweet is being viewed in Maldives as an indication of Indian strategy.
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Why is India concerned?

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- India believes it is a “responsible” power in the region.
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- It also urges major powers in the world to follow “rules-based order”.
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- So India would not want to play an interventionist role in Maldives elections.
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- But like the western community, its priority is restoration of full-fledged democracy.
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- However, for India, more than this, the geopolitical stakes in the island rank

high.
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- Notably, Maldives has emerged as a spot of geopolitical tussle between India and China.
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- It has been carefully using its newfound proximity to China to make India wary.
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- China is expanding its footprint in Maldives through the Belt and Road Initiative.
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- It is also involved in building massive infrastructure in and around Malé.
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- India also faces an economic challenge, with Maldives signing a Free Trade agreement with China.
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Source: Indian Express

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