India-Maldives Relations

Why in news?

External Affairs Minister of India visited Maldives, at a fraught time for the country's president, Ibrahim Solih, who will run for a second term in the presidential election.

What does this mean to India?

- For Delhi, the feuding over the election in the Maldives is bad news.
- Relations between India and the Maldives have improved dramatically since 2018, when Solih defeated Abdulla Yameen, president from 2013 to 2018 who had a pro-China tilt.
- Now Abdulla Yameen is the presidential candidate in the election.

What are India's involvements in Maldives?

Greater Male Connectivity Project

- The $500-million Greater Male Connectivity project is the biggest infra project that India has begun in Maldives.
- This project aims to link the Maldives capital to 3 neighboring highlands with a 6.74-k bridge and causeway over the sea.

Hanimadhoo Airport

- India is developing an international airport at Hanimadhoo in Haaa Dahaalu atoll of the Maldivian archipelago.
- The $ 136.6-million development of the Hanimadhoo airport has been financed by a line of credit to the Maldives from India's Exim Bank.
- It will be executed by the Indian company JMC Projects Ltd.
- It includes the development of a 2.46-km runway, and a terminal with an annual capacity for 1.3 million passengers.
- This is the second biggest infra project that India has begun in recent months after the $500-million Greater Male Connectivity project.

> *Both Greater Male Connectivity project and Hanimadhoo Airport are prestige projects for Delhi that compete in scale with the Chinese built Male-Hulumale-Hulhule bridge and the Hulumale airport.*

Other projects

- In the Manadhoo island of Noonu atoll, the two sides signed three MoUs, including

    - a proposed collaboration between Cochin University and Maldives National University, and
    - a $100 million grant for “high impact community development” projects.
- In the Foakaidhoo Island in the Shaviyani atoll, India has inaugurated an India-funded community centre.

What is the history of India-Maldives relations?

- India and Maldives share ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious and commercial links steeped in antiquity and enjoy close, cordial and multi-dimensional relations.
- India was among the first to recognise Maldives after its independence in 1965 and to establish diplomatic relations with the country.
- India established its mission at the level of CDA in 1972 and resident High Commissioner in 1980.
- Maldives opened a full-fledged High Commission in New Delhi in 2004, at that time one of its only four diplomatic missions worldwide.

What had developed the India-Maldives relationship?

- Three incidents (in 1988, 2004 and 2014) had established the advantages of India’s proximity and capacity to come to Maldives’ rescue in distress vis-à-vis any other country.

Year	Incident
1988	India’s prompt assistance during the 1988 coup attempt.
2004	India was the first to assist Maldives during the 2004 Tsunami.
2014	India was the first to assist Maldives during the water crisis in Malé in 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.

How do both countries interact on international level?

- Maldives had consistently supported India in multilateral fora, such as the UN, the Commonwealth, the NAM and the SAARC.
- Maldives co-sponsored the G-4 draft resolutions on UN reforms.
- India has extended support to Maldives candidature for a non-permanent seat in the UN Security Council for the term 2019-20.

The importance of India’s strategic role in Maldives is well-recognized, with India being seen as a net security provider. ‘India First’ has been a stated policy of the Government of Maldives.

Reference

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