Maldivian Crisis

What is the issue?

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Increasing foreign presence in the tiny island nation of Maldives in the Indian Ocean is of significance to India.

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What is the Political background of Maldives?

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- The Maldives was ruled by ‘Maumoon Abdul Gayoom’ for 30 years and was a single-party state until 2008, with the executive being in charge of the civil service, the security forces and the judiciary.
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- This was challenged by Nasheed, who contested the 2008 presidential elections and won it.
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- A new constitution was formulated, but after four years, in 2012 Nasheed was overthrown in a coup & eventually exiled.
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- In 2013, fresh presidential elections were held and former president Gayoom’s brother, Abdulla Yameen, became president through what Nasheed supporters say was a rigged election.
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- Naseed was tried and found guilty of terrorism and given a 13-year jail sentence, effectively barring him a return anytime soon.
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What are the foreign influences in Maldieves lately?

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- While Naseed sought Indian support, Yameen too became very active on the foreign policy front, hoping to secure his position.

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- **China -** Chinese President Xi Jimping visited Maldives in 2014 and mooted the idea of a Maritime Silk Road (MSR) connectivity.
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- Maldives even amended its laws that barred foreigners from buying land for China's comfort.
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- Chinese tourists too are increasingly flocking to the Maldives.
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- Further, an airport project allocated by the Naseed regime to the Indian promoter GMR was cancelled & given to a Chinese firm, although an international arbitration eventually favoured GMR.
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- **Saudi Arabia -** Maldives is a 100% sunni Islamic republic, which naturally led Yammen to think of an Arab alliance.
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- Saudi has drawn up plans for a massive integrated development project in the Maldives.
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- The risk of this increased visible presence of Saudi Arabia is that it could have a radicalising effect on the younger Maldivians, which could have consequences for India.
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- Radicalisation is already being noticed as hundreds of young Maldivians have been found to have joined the IS.
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How has India reacted to these developments?

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- Initially India had almost openly sided with the Nasheed administration and even lobbied within the Commonwealth to impose sanctions on Maldives for unceremoniously ousting him.
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- Eventually, geo-political pressures forced India to rectify its equations with Yameen, which was apparent in his 2016 visit to India that also saw the signing of a defence agreement.
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- Continous vigilance on the political developments in Maldives is of primacy due its strategic location & proximity to India.
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Source: Business Standard

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