

This article is related to General  
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### "The second Modi government sends a powerful 'neighbourhood first' message."

In a reaffirmation of New Delhi's 'Neighbourhood First' policy, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first visit abroad is to the Maldives and Sri Lanka, while S. Jaishankar wraps up his first visit abroad as Foreign Minister to Bhutan. Leaders of several neighbouring countries were invited to Mr. Modi's swearing-in ceremony.

This is the first state visit by Mr. Modi to Male, which he had visited briefly for the swearing-in of President Ibu Solih in November 2018. A series of agreements are expected during the visits, including the implementation of an \$800 million Line of Credit to the Maldives.

The projects include a cricket stadium, water purification and sewerage systems, as well as a Coastal Surveillance Radar System and a Composite Training Centre for the Maldives National Defence Force. This follows the Indian practice of fulfilling the needs of neighbouring countries that they themselves identify, much as it has done in Afghanistan.

The Prime Minister's visit to the Maldives aims to send a three-pronged message: to continue high-level contacts between close neighbours, assist as development partners, and strengthen people-to-people ties. For Sri Lanka, Mr. Modi's message is one of solidarity in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday terror attacks and the communal violence that followed, as well as a commitment to continue bilateral cooperation on joint development projects agreed to in 2017. He will be the first international leader to visit Colombo since the attacks, and his visit sends a powerful message as Sri Lanka tries to recover from the trauma.

The atmospherics today are in contrast to the comparatively trickier relationship with the previous governments in Male and Colombo during Mr. Modi's first tenure. In 2015, Mr. Modi had cancelled a visit to Male at the last minute following concerns over then-President Abdulla Yameen's crackdown on Opposition parties. Similar misgivings had cropped up regarding former Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa's regime.

China's inroads into the region had formed a common thread straining ties with both countries. India protested when the Yameen government signed a free trade agreement with Beijing, and granted China land for development. It made its displeasure clear over the many infrastructure projects Mr. Rajapaksa granted to Chinese companies under heavy Chinese loans.

Deeper concerns arose from the Chinese naval presence in both Male and Colombo. Now, the situation

has turned. Governments in both countries have changed. Besides a charm offensive, India has chosen to mute its opposition to their continued cooperation with China on the Belt and Road Initiative.

It also comes from a realisation in Delhi that at a time when factors such as the U.S.-China trade tussles and tensions in West Asia pose uncertainties, strong neighbourhood ties can provide much comfort.

## GS World Team...

### Indo-Maldives relations

#### Why in the discussion?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi is going to Maldives on 8th June on his first foreign trip after assuming power for the second time.
- This visit of PM is being linked with the importance of neighboring countries of India and the policy of (Neighborhood First).
- PM Modi will also address the Parliament of the Maldives, which will be on the eyes of all the neighboring countries of India.
- After that he will go to Sri Lanka from Maldives.

#### Background

- India has centuries-old cultural relations with the Maldives.
- New Delhi has religious, linguistic, cultural and business relations with the Maldives.
- India was among the first countries to recognize the Maldives after its Independence in the year 1965. Later India opened its embassy in Maldives in 1972.
- Ibrahim Solih became the President of the Maldives in November 2018.
- PM Narendra Modi attended the oath taking ceremony of Ibrahim Solihah. President Ibrahim Soli.

#### main point

- Modi and Maldivian President will jointly inaugurate two defense related projects, which include a coastal surveillance radar system and the comprehensive training center for the Maldives National Defense Forces (MNDF).
- From this visit of PM Modi, the principle of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) of India is to encircle the security and development for everyone in the region.

#### Key facts related to the agreement last year

- India and Maldives had agreed to increase bilateral cooperation on general concerns including piracy, terrorism, organized crime, drug trafficking and human trafficking.
- India had called for strengthening of trade between the two countries in the field of health, human resources development, infrastructure, agriculture, capacity building and tourism.
- The leaders of both the countries agreed to increase economic cooperation in the field of fisheries, tourism, traffic, connectivity, health, education, information technology, innovative and renewable energy and communication.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi appreciated the decision of Maldives to rejoin the Commonwealth and welcomed the participation in the Indian Ocean Rim Association.

#### Indo-Maldivian Relations

- India and Maldives have been friendly and close in tactical, economic and military cooperation. India has contributed to the security of the island nation.
- The Maldives has now emerged out of the category of less developed countries and has become a middle income country.
- The Government of India appreciated the assistance being given to the Maldives and identified for cooperation in development of many areas including private sector involvement, water and drainage system, health facilities, education and tourism sector in home and infrastructure development.
- Maldives is a country of 1200 islands located in the Indian Ocean, which is strategically important for India. Supply of energy to China, Japan and India, through the maritime route of the Maldives occurs.

**Expected Questions (Prelims Exams)**

**Q. Consider the following statements-**

1. At present, Maldives is not a member of Commonwealth.
2. Maldives is the smallest country in Asia in regards to both population and area.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- (a) Only 1
- (b) Only 2
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Expected Questions (Mains Exams)**

**Q. What type of strategy should India adopt to reduce the increasing influence of China in Maldives and Sri Lanka? Discuss.**

**(250 Words)**

**Note:** Answer of Prelims Expected Question given on 7 June is 1 (a)

