



Balancing Act: India's Foreign Policy in the Maldives Amidst China's Expanding Footprint

Arya S S

Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, S N College Kollam, University of Kerala

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22082777>

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Received: 30-06-2026

Accepted: 19-07-2026

Published: 20-08-2026

Keywords:

Geo Politics, Indian Ocean Region, Maritime security, Neighbourhood First Policy, Soft power, Strategic security

ABSTRACT

The Indian Ocean has developed into an avenue of strategic contestation; small island states like the Maldives are becoming linchpins of international contestation between regional players. The present article analysis India's foreign policy towards the Maldives in the context of an expanded Chinese economic and strategic footprint in the area. India and the Maldives have a long-standing relationship rooted in history, culture, and civilization with a basis of mutual trust and neighbourhood: the two were considered strategic partners at the same time by both sides. However, with increasing Chinese presence comes increasing threats to India's calculations. There are a few key dynamic interactions that will be examined, including but not limited to India developing and defining its own strategy and foreign policy nuances, identifying unique events of recalibration, and strategic articulations, especially in the period after 2018, when the Maldives had undergone further democratization, providing the opportunity for continued engagement. Through a qualitative research methodology, combining both primary and secondary data was collected through structured interview with the academic experts and scholars based in the Maldives. The policy documents, bilateral agreements, public statements, and regional security initiatives, the paper assesses India's multidimensional approach:

Disclaimer: The opinions, interpretations, conclusions, recommendations, analyses, and statements expressed in this research article are solely those of the author(s) and do not reflect the views, policies, or positions of the Publisher, Chief Editor, Editors, Editorial Board, Reviewers, or their affiliated institutions. The author(s) are solely responsible for ensuring the originality, authenticity, and integrity of the manuscript and for ensuring that it is free from plagiarism, AI-generated content, copyright infringement, data falsification, and any other form of academic misconduct.

combining economic aid, infrastructure development, defence cooperation, and people-to-people linkages under the framework of “Neighbourhood First” and “SAGAR” (Security and Growth for All in the Region). The India-Maldives relationship within the broader regional dynamics of Indo-Pacific security, the study underscores the strategic dilemma India faces of deepening ties without appearing coercive, while also countering the appeal of Chinese investments. The paper concludes by reflecting on the sustainability of India’s current foreign policy approach and the need for long-term strategic vision in securing its maritime periphery.

Introduction

The Indian Ocean is becoming increasingly pivotal in the geopolitics of the 21st century. The Maldives attract significant attention from major global powers due to its strategic location in the Indian Ocean Region. This archipelagic country comprising approximately 1,190 coral islands which connects South Asia with East Africa, the Middle East, and beyond. Traditionally Maldives is within India’s natural sphere of influence, in the past two decades, strengthened its relationships with external entities, particularly China. India aims to maintain its influence and ensure regional security without compromising Maldivian sovereignty.

Historically, the relationship between India and the Maldives has been strong. India's naval assistance to reinstate Maldivian sovereignty during the 1988 coup (Operation Cactus) serves as a guiding principle of mutual trust. India has been a key partner in defence training, maritime security collaboration, grant and concessional financing, as well as fostering people-to-people connections through education, medical services, and tourism. From a strategic perspective, India regards the Maldives as a key partner in two ways: firstly, as a neighbouring nation whose stability and alignment impact India’s maritime landscape; and secondly, as a geographical buffer consisting of islands situated near critical choke points. This blend of closeness and long-standing relationships grants New Delhi a position of significant influence. The decisions made by Malé regarding its sovereignty, its internal political dynamics, and external proposals all play a role in determining outcomes.



Historical relations between India and Maldives

India and the Maldives have maintained profound historical connections influenced by geography, culture, trade, and strategic interests for many centuries. India was among the first nations to acknowledge the Maldives' independence from British colonial rule in 1965, promptly establishing diplomatic relations that have since developed into a multifaceted partnership characterized by collaboration and occasional difficulties (MEA, 2024). Relations between the two countries are founded on ancient ties—ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and commercial. As neighbouring maritime nations, the Maldives and southern India have been interconnected for centuries through trade, religion, and interpersonal exchanges (Bussa, 2018). Prior to the 12th century, Buddhism was the predominant religion in the Maldives, and substantial evidence indicates considerable cultural and religious interactions with the Indian subcontinent during this period. With the rise of Islam as the dominant faith in the Maldives, these cultural exchanges persisted, fostering a sense of warmth between the two societies (Grover, 2000). The security collaboration intensified in 1988 during Operation Cactus, when India promptly intervened in response to a coup attempt in Malé, thereby strengthening trust as a strategic ally. Since then, India has consistently offered security assistance, provided patrol aircraft, helicopters, and radar systems, and has trained the Maldivian military forces (Sengupta, 2023).

Former President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih implemented an 'India-First Policy' from 2018 to 2023. During this period, India extended debt relief and supported significant infrastructure projects, including the construction of a major bridge linking Malé, Villimalé, and two additional islands. However, by the time of the 2023 election, India's growing diplomatic footprint in the Maldives was met with public discontent. An opposition-led 'India out' campaign garnered widespread support, particularly as their allegations regarding India's purported influence over Solih's administration and the presence of a small Indian military contingent in the Maldives went largely unchallenged by Solih. This military presence played a role in Solih's defeat in the election. Muizzu assumed office in November 2023, making an electoral commitment to tackle issues regarding India's purported influence, beginning with a demand for India to retract its military presence. Following his inauguration, Muizzu's initial foreign visit was to Turkey instead of India, which could indicate a desire to distance himself from a longstanding ally (Rasheed, 2024).

China's expanding footprint in the Maldives

China's growing presence in the Maldives has emerged as one of the most notable developments in the Indian Ocean region, supported by significant investments in finance, infrastructure, and a new series of security agreements that are reshaping Malé's foreign and economic strategies. The evolution of this



partnership, propelled by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), carries substantial consequences for the Maldives' political independence, debt sustainability, and the overall regional power dynamics (Basarkar, 2024). Since its accession to the BRI in 2014, the Maldives has incurred approximately \$1.4 billion in loans from Chinese financial institutions, which accounts for 20% of the country's public debt and potentially up to 70% of its total foreign debt, according to various estimates. The majority of this funding has been provided as concessional loans from prominent entities such as the Export-Import Bank of China for infrastructure projects, with the Maldivian central bank indicating around \$600 million as direct sovereign debt and an additional \$900 million allocated to private firms under state guarantees (Singh, 2022).

China's most notable investment in the Maldives is the \$200 million *China-Maldives Friendship Bridge* (Sinamalé Bridge), which was completed in 2018. This bridge connects the capital, Malé, to the international airport, thereby enhancing urban connectivity (Shameem, 2025). Other significant projects include the expansion of *Ibrahim Nasir International Airport*, the development of large housing complexes in Hulhumalé, road redevelopment initiatives, the construction of new government council buildings, and efforts in renewable energy. As of January 2025, the newly implemented *China-Maldives Free Trade Agreement* (FTA) eliminates duties on nearly 8,000 items, including fishery products. This development broadens China's economic involvement and may redirect substantial portions of Maldivian exports towards Chinese markets (Singh, 2022).

Numerous projects have been initiated to capitalize on the Maldives' advantageous geographic location along essential maritime routes. The Chinese have shown a particular interest in the northernmost Ihavandhippolhu Integrated Development Project (Ihavandhoo), which is situated on critical shipping lanes connecting Southeast Asia and Europe—this positioning further complicates regional strategic dynamics. China's involvement extends beyond mere economic and infrastructural interests. In March 2024, the Maldives and China formalized a new bilateral military agreement—an unprecedented move that signifies Malé's deepening defense collaboration with Beijing and a shift away from its historical security partnerships with India. China's motivations are rooted in the need to protect its energy supplies, the majority of which traverse Maldivian waters, thereby fostering a desire for ongoing influence over local security policies and access to networks (Malali, 2024).

India's balancing act: posture, instruments and constraints in India Maldives relation

India's strategy regarding its relationship with the Maldives is a complex balancing act influenced by strategic objectives, practical considerations, and regional rivalries. This approach is founded on assertive adaptable diplomacy, a comprehensive array of economic and security tools, and the practical management



of both internal and external limitations. India positions itself as the Maldives' closest ally and primary responder, highlighting a 'Neighbourhood First' policy alongside the SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision. This commitment includes maintaining maritime security, ensuring political stability, and fostering economic resilience in the Indian Ocean is a vital area for India's trade and energy routes. India's leadership continually reaffirms its dominance in the Maldives, as evidenced by high-level summits, civilian and security assistance, and significant diplomatic adjustments following periods of tension, such as after the 2023 'India Out' campaign and the increasing influence of China.

India employs a spectrum of instruments to sustain its influence:

1. **Economic Support:** India has utilized lines of credit, grants, debt relief, and trade integration to enhance the stability of the Maldivian economy. Recent instances include a ₹4,850 crore credit line, significant debt relief, and new infrastructure collaborations such as the Greater Malé Connectivity Project. Efforts in health, digital payments (UPI, RuPay), and currency swaps have strengthened economic relations and diminished reliance on external actors.
2. **Security and Defence Cooperation:** India serves as the Maldives' primary security ally, offering training, patrol platforms, and operational collaboration to safeguard essential sea routes and tackle maritime threats such as piracy and trafficking. Defence diplomacy encompasses capacity-building, regular military exercises, and technical support. Investments in critical security infrastructure, including the Uthuru Thila Falhu (UTF) base, highlight India's commitment to integrating the Maldives into its maritime security framework.
3. **People to people contacts:** India provides scholarships, medical assistance, disaster relief, and cultural exchanges, promoting goodwill. Numerous Maldivians share historical, educational, or economic connections with India, enhancing its soft power.
4. **Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR):** India has a longstanding tradition of aiding the Maldives during crises, particularly in 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) is a crucial component of India's softpower diplomacy strategy. A significant occurrence was India's collaborative HADR exercise with the Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) at Maafilaafushi Atoll from May 4 to 10, 2025, which included the participation of the Indian Naval Ship INS Sharda. This exercise improved interoperability in various domains, including disaster response coordination, Search and Rescue (SAR) operations, medical support, logistical assistance, as well as community engagement and capacity development (Defence, 2025).



5. Infrastructure and connectivity: India and the Maldives share a robust partnership in infrastructure and connectivity, backed by significant and high-impact projects that boost urban growth, economic activity, and regional integration in the Maldives. *Greater Malé Connectivity Project (GMCP)* is India's largest infrastructure endeavour in the Maldives, valued at \$500 million, featuring a 6.74 km bridge-causeway network linking Malé with neighbouring islands (Villingili, Gulhifalhu, and Thilafushi). The project is set to enhance connectivity for nearly half the population and foster economic growth, tourism, and regional trade. *Addu City Roads and Reclamation*, a \$200 million beautification and resilience initiative includes road development and land reclamation critical for southern Maldives' urban expansion and climate adaptation (MEA, English Translation of Press Statement by Prime Minister during Joint Press Statement with the President of Maldives, 2025).

India's connection with the Maldives exemplifies its effort to balance strategic necessities, the development of partnerships, and geopolitical rivalry. This approach integrates proactive involvement and strategic reassurance, while also honouring sovereignty. India utilizes a wide array of tools diplomatic, economic, security, humanitarian, cultural, and communicative to sustain its influence in a comprehensive manner. However, the internal political instability in the Maldives, the strategic presence of China, are the major.

India's strategy involves a meticulous balance of assertive engagement and diplomatic sensitivity, designed to uphold its influence in the strategically significant Indian Ocean while honouring Maldivian sovereignty and public opinion. It is essential for India to continue utilizing a combination of robust measures, such as defence collaboration and infrastructure development, alongside softer approaches like cultural diplomacy and economic assistance. Tackling geopolitical rivalry with China and addressing internal challenges within the Maldives are crucial for maintaining this equilibrium. Consequently, India's stance remains flexible actively engaging, negotiating, and adjusting to preserve its position as the Maldives' closest and most dependable ally in the face of changing regional dynamics.

Domestic politics in the Maldives and foreign policy choices

Domestic politics in the Maldives have gained significant influence over the nation's foreign policy, particularly regarding India-Maldives relations. Factors such as political instability, competing power factions, and evolving leadership priorities frequently lead to substantial shifts in diplomatic strategies and impact bilateral collaboration. In recent years, the Maldives has experienced notable political turbulence. The current President assumed office in 2023 on an "India Out" platform, vehemently opposing India's military presence and economic sway. This campaign resonated with segments of the Maldivian populace and opposition groups who viewed India's involvement as a challenge to national sovereignty. The anti-



India discourse intensified following contentious remarks from Maldivian officials and conflicts concerning fishing rights and military partnerships (Sultana, 2024).

Domestic politics in the Maldives is characterized by competing campaigns that supports strengthening ties with India for economic and developmental advantages, and another, which leans more towards nationalism, advocating for a shift towards China and a decrease in dependence on India. This situation results in significant fluctuations in policy and ongoing bilateral tensions, complicating India's involvement in the Maldives and making it more sensitive. India continues to be the Maldives' primary development partner (Moorthy, 2023). In 2025, India redefined its relations by providing a substantial line of credit, easing debt repayments, and accelerating collaborative projects in areas such as infrastructure, housing, health, and digital integration. Initiatives like the Greater Malé Connectivity Project, along with new health and digital programmes, demonstrate India's dedication to maintaining its influence and countering China's economic footprint.

Economic vulnerability remains a persistent challenge in the Maldives, prompting leaders to pursue external partnerships for financial assistance. Historically, India's concessional credit and emergency aid have reinforced bilateral relations, while China's investments in infrastructure and debt-driven projects offer an alternative, occasionally more appealing, source of funding. This dynamic intensifies geopolitical rivalry and complicates the Maldives' efforts to maintain a balanced foreign policy (Shivamurthy, 2023). The foreign policy of the Maldives fluctuates between an "India First" approach and engagement with China. The anticipated return to cooperation in 2025, marked by the Indian Prime Minister's visit for Independence Day and the establishment of new bilateral agreements, demonstrates a pragmatic diplomatic stance—acknowledging that Indian support is vital for the nation's stability and development (India, 2025). Nevertheless, the domestic sentiment can swiftly turn against India, particularly regarding matters such as military presence, perceived interference, or contentious sector disputes (for instance, fisheries). This tendency towards short-term thinking, combined with the growing influence of China, periodically strains relations and reveals weaknesses in India's regional strategy (Rasheed A. A., 2024).

The domestic politics of the Maldives play a crucial role in influencing India-Maldives relations, as shifts in leadership and public opinion frequently affect foreign policy. Although strategic and economic ties are robust, the relationship faces challenges from anti-India movements, Chinese influence, and delicate sovereignty issues. The future is expected to entail ongoing balancing efforts and occasional adjustments driven by both internal political dynamics and external geopolitical circumstances (Mallempati, 2024).



The recent shifts in foreign policy under the new administration, particularly with regard to India, led to concern within the Maldives, as well as in India. Ignoring the benefits of mutual cooperation in economic and security matters may not augur well for the regional peace and security. Thus, there is a need to collaborate on development projects as well as through regional security mechanisms. Both nations can work on the areas of combating the mutual threats such as, rising extremism, drug and human trafficking etc (Brewster, 2023).

India emerged as one of the important development, economic and security partner of the Maldives, in the last few years. The \$1.4 billion financial assistance provided by India in 2018, after the formation of the MDP government in Male, helped to address the post pandemic economic needs of the country, in terms of budgetary support, currency swap, lines of credit etc. India being the closest neighbour to Maldives, its contribution in disaster response in the past cannot be ruled out. Help extended to the island nation in safeguarding the sovereignty and territorial integrity through operation Cactus in 1988, in tackling the impact of Tsunami in 2004, Pandemic related loss, handling the water crisis etc. by India are important gesture in building the trust and friendship between the two nations regardless of the government in place (Mallempati, 2024).

The number of high-level bilateral exchanges has led to increased cooperation across nearly all sectors. India has backed development initiatives and investments in the island nation, aimed at benefiting the average Maldivians and forming a crucial part of the Maldives' economic development path. A recent instance of this is the upcoming operationalization of the new runway at Hanimaadhoo Airport, a \$136 million project financed by India, intended to enhance tourism. It is important to highlight that the strengthened strategic and economic partnership with India, under the MDP government, did not prevent the island nation from engaging with external powers beyond the region in the past. The Maldives has maintained amicable relations with the West, the Middle East, and China, to advance its economic and security objectives, without compromising its relationship with its trusted neighbour, India. Regarding the Maldives' relations with China, India has stated that 'it is for Maldives to decide about their international relations.' Meanwhile, India will be closely monitoring developments to ensure that peace and stability are preserved in the region (Dr.K.Mallikarjuna, 2024).

At the domestic level, there are several challenges that the leadership must confront. In addition to the volatile political climate and impeachment efforts by the Opposition MDP, the President has committed to various initiatives aimed at fostering economic growth, including the development of smart urban centers, job creation, and the enhancement of the tourism sector, among others. To fulfill these commitments, the



government requires increased foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows across multiple sectors. In 2022, Maldives' FDI inflows were recorded at \$721.9 million. China, Singapore, India, the UAE, and the UK represent the five primary investors in the Maldives. Furthermore, the government must tackle the issue of external debt, which has arisen from loans obtained from foreign entities and a decrease in tourism arrivals during the pandemic years. As of 2022, the total outstanding external debt of the Maldives was \$3.5 billion, with approximately \$1.3 billion owed to China. (Shivamurthy, orf, 2025)

“Economic interdependence, debt diplomacy, and transparency concerns

The Maldives became a participant in China's Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) in 2014, it has amassed a significant amount of external debt from Chinese sources, estimated to be around \$1.3 to \$1.4 billion according to recent assessments. This positions China as one of the Maldives' largest individual creditors, accounting for a considerable portion of the nation's external debt (Basarkar, 2024). India plays a crucial role as a partner by providing grants, Lines of Credit (LoCs), and ongoing balance-of-payments or liquidity assistance, such as recent rollovers and expanded LoC packages. This arrangement affords New Delhi both developmental influence and immediate fiscal support mechanisms (MEA, Ministry of External Affairs, 2024).

A significant portion of the Maldives' increase in external debt is attributed to substantial infrastructure initiatives (such as bridges, airport expansions, and harbour developments), public investments made after 2014, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism and foreign exchange reserves. China-funded initiatives, along with lending from Chinese banks, have played a pivotal role in this infrastructure development. Critics, including certain Maldivian politicians, contend that China's lending practices have resulted in strategic leverage and precarious debt situations, often referred to as the "debt-trap" narrative. However, empirical research and academic discourse advise caution against sweeping generalizations: the outcomes are contingent upon the terms of contracts, repayment timelines, and the ability of projects to generate sustainable income. Nonetheless, the significant presence of Chinese lending raises important financial and geopolitical concerns regarding the sovereignty of the Maldives and its relations with regional stakeholders (Initiative, 2020).

Transparency gaps including inadequate procurement oversight, insufficient public disclosure of loan terms and guarantees, and political interference in project planning have heightened the risks that substantial loans may become fiscally unsustainable or lead to corruption.



Chinese investments focused on extensive infrastructure projects have notably heightened Maldivian external debt levels, prompting worries regarding debt sustainability, fiscal fragility, and strategic influence. India has not responded by equating China's financial contributions dollar-for-dollar; instead, it has utilized a unique financial toolkit comprising grants, concessional Lines of Credit, immediate liquidity support, and capacity-building assistance. These tools are consistent with India's longstanding approach in the region emphasizing sovereignty, developmental partnerships, and prompt crisis assistance. This approach has enabled India to sustain its influence, even with its relatively lower lending volumes. Consequently, the economic domain serves as both a strategic battleground and a platform for cooperation. On one side, the heightened rivalry between India and China influences financing flows, project priorities, and political affiliations. Conversely, common challenges such as climate vulnerability, infrastructure demands, and debt restructuring offer India the chance to collaborate with Maldivian authorities and multilateral organizations to foster transparent, sustainable, and resilient development pathways (Initiative, 2020).

Policy Options for India: Calibrating Instruments in India–Maldives Relations

India has been concentrating on a balanced strategy of diplomatic renewal and strategic collaboration to navigate the intricate relationship. Recent high-level visits and joint exercises indicate a commitment to transcend previous tensions and enhance regional stability. India is encouraged to transition from a troop-centric presence to a civilian-led cooperation model, focusing on capacity building, maritime security, and humanitarian assistance. This strategy is in harmony with Maldivian sensitivities and encourages soft security partnerships. Proposing collaborative investment frameworks in ports, digital connectivity, and renewable energy can yield mutual advantages. Additionally, establishing a bilateral development financing facility and fostering people-to-people connections through cultural and educational exchanges are equally essential (Mallempati, 2024).

Considering the strategic positioning of the Maldives, India ought to pursue partnerships in the blue economy that emphasize marine biotechnology, fisheries, and sustainable shipping. Collaborative initiatives in these areas could serve as a foundation for enduring economic and security relationships. A well-structured strategic and economic dialogue between India and the Maldives, complemented by regular summits and mechanisms for crisis management, would guarantee consistent engagement. Regional frameworks aimed at enhancing debt transparency and providing financial assistance can bolster the economic stability of the Maldives. Joint projects focused on technology transfer in digital infrastructure and climate adaptation can enhance functional cooperation. India's proficiency in digital public infrastructure and climate resilience can be tailored to fit the Maldivian context. Increasing cultural



exchanges, scholarships, and community engagement initiatives can help restore grassroots goodwill and mitigate negative perceptions. Programmes such as eco-tourism and heritage circuits, which involve local communities, promote economic interdependence and mutual prosperity. India's policy alternatives centre around a carefully calibrated blend of military, diplomatic, economic, and soft-power strategies that honour Maldivian sovereignty while safeguarding regional stability and security interests. The recent diplomatic reset and strategic engagement indicate a positive outlook, provided these initiatives are maintained and adjusted to the evolving regional geopolitics (Shivamurthy, 2023).

India ought to enhance the India–Maldives Joint Commission and High-Level Core Group mechanisms to facilitate structured engagement among governments, bureaucracies, and parliaments. This approach serves to protect relations from shifts in regimes and personal political agendas. India should maintain a non-partisan position in Maldivian domestic affairs, fostering connections with all significant political entities. An excessive alignment with a single political group has historically incited anti-India sentiments. India's Line of Credit (LoC) initiatives—such as the Greater Malé Connectivity Project—should prioritize transparency, local capacity enhancement, and environmental sustainability. This stands in stark contrast to the non-transparent financing models employed by China. Promoting Indian private sector investments in tourism, fintech, renewable energy, and ICT sectors can help diversify Maldivian economic reliance and bolster long-term interdependence. India can provide grant-based assistance, currency swaps, and budgetary support; however, these efforts must be strategically coordinated with capacity-building initiatives to avoid perceptions of economic hegemony (Kamalakar, 2025).

The relationship between India and the Maldives is currently at a pivotal point, influenced by conflicting narratives regarding sovereignty, development, and influence. For India, the primary challenge is not to assert its dominance but to fine-tune its methods of engagement—striking a balance between strategic interests and honouring Maldivian autonomy. By integrating hard security collaboration with soft-power diplomacy, and by promoting transparent, mutually advantageous partnerships, India can ensure that its involvement in the Maldives is perceived as legitimate, resilient, and forward-looking. The overarching policy objective should be to cultivate a sovereign, stable, and amicable Maldives that regards India not as a hegemonic force, but as a reliable ally in the realms of peace, prosperity, and regional security (Sreenivas, 2024).

Conclusions

India's involvement with the Maldives reflects the larger challenge of balancing strategic rivalry with maintaining goodwill in the region. The shifting triangular relationship among India, the Maldives, and



China has turned this island nation into a vital testing ground for India's regional diplomacy within the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). As China enhances its economic and infrastructural influence through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and associated maritime projects, India is compelled to maintain its strategic dominance without coming across as coercive or interventionist. In the last ten years, India's foreign policy towards the Maldives has evolved from a reactive stance to a more nuanced, multi-faceted engagement. This evolution highlights a strategic understanding: that lasting influence in the region cannot depend solely on security leverage or historical ties, but must be based on mutual benefits, institutional strength, and developmental collaboration. India's strategy—rooted in the "Neighbourhood First" and "Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)" principles—aims to integrate hard-power capabilities with soft-power diplomacy, humanitarian aid, and people-oriented cooperation.

India's policy should prioritize inclusive regionalism, transparency in development cooperation, and the respect for Maldivian sovereignty. Establishing resilient institutions—rather than relying on personality-driven relationships—will aid in shielding bilateral relations from political instability. India should also enhance collaboration in areas such as climate change adaptation, the blue economy, and digital connectivity, ensuring that its strategic goals align with the developmental aspirations of the Maldivian populace. The effectiveness of India's foreign policy in the Maldives will be assessed not by its ability to compete with China, but by its capability to foster lasting goodwill, institutional trust, and fair interdependence. The measure of India's diplomatic efforts lies in converting proximity into partnership and influence into legitimacy. Consequently, the future of India–Maldives relations hinges on maintaining a dynamic equilibrium one that reconciles strategic competition with cooperative coexistence, thereby guaranteeing that the Indian Ocean remains a region characterized by peace, stability, and inclusive growth.

References

- Basarkar, R. (2024, May 2). *Council on Foreign Relations*. Retrieved from The Maldives Is Moving Toward China. Here's What to Know: <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/maldives-moving-toward-china-heres-what-know>
- Brewster, D. (2023, June 7). *The Interpreter*. Retrieved from Maldives' presidential election: it's not just: <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/maldives-presidential-election-it-s-not-just-about-india-china>
- Bussa, D. L. (2018). *India Maldives Relations*. New Delhi: Avni Publications .



- Defence, M. o. (2025, May 5). *PIB*. Retrieved from <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2126999>
- Dr.K.Mallikarjuna. (2024, April 4). Retrieved from Bridging The Divide: Dynamics And Diplomacy: <https://www.ijert.org/papers/IJCRT2404260.pdf>
- Grover, V. (2000). *Maldives Government and Politics*. New Delhi: Deep and Deep publications.
- India, N. o. (2025, October). Retrieved from PM Modi Concludes Successful State Visit To Maldives; Terms It ‘Extremely Productive’: [https://www.newsonair.gov.in/pm-modi-concludes-successful-state-visit-to-maldives-terms-it-extremely-productive/#:~:text=Prime%20Minister%20Narendra%20Modi%20described,Maldives%20President%](https://www.newsonair.gov.in/pm-modi-concludes-successful-state-visit-to-maldives-terms-it-extremely-productive/#:~:text=Prime%20Minister%20Narendra%20Modi%20described,Maldives%20President%20)
- Initiative, A. M. (2020). *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative*. Retrieved from Chinese Investment in the Maldives: Appraising the String of Pearls: <https://amti.csis.org/chinese-investment-in-the-maldives-appraising-the-string-of-pearls>
- Kamalakar, G. R. (2025). *International Journal of Social Impact*.
- Malali, D. B. (2024). Retrieved from India, China, and the Maldives: An Analysis.
- Mallempati, D. S. (2024, February 5). *ICWA*. Retrieved from Maldives Foreign Policy Shifts: An Appeal to Domestic Constituency?: https://www.icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=3&ls_id=10476&lid=6678
- MEA. (2024, March). *Ministry of External Affairs*. Retrieved from India-Maldives Bilateral Relations: <https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Bilateral-Brief-Unclassified-March-2024.pdf>
- MEA. (2025, July 25). Retrieved from English Translation of Press Statement by Prime Minister during Joint Press Statement with the President of Maldives : <https://www.mea.gov.in/outgoing-visit-detail.htm?39873%2FEnglish+Translation+of+Press+Statement+by+Prime+Minister+during+Joint+Press+Statement+with+the+President+of+Maldives>
- Moorthy, N. S. (2023, January 6). *orf*. Retrieved from Maldives: The effects of domestic politics on foreign policy: <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/maldives-the-effects-of-domestic-politics-on-foreign-policy>



- Rasheed, A. (2024, February 13). *East Asia Forum*. Retrieved from Balancing internal and external obligations in the Maldives' foreign policy: <https://eastasiaforum.org/2024/02/23/balancing-internal-and-external-obligations-in-the-maldives-foreign-policy>
- Rasheed, A. A. (2024, April 26). *The Diplomat*. Retrieved from Voters Back Maldives Change in Foreign Policy: <https://thediplomat.com/2024/04/voters-back-maldives-change-in-foreign-policy/>
- Sengupta, A. (2023, November). *Indian Express*. Retrieved from Operation Cactus: When India prevented a coup in Maldives: <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-history/operation-cactus-india-prevented-coup-maldives-9012435/>
- Shameem, D. (2025, March 11). India Maldives Relations. (A. s. s, Interviewer)
- Shivamurthy, A. G. (2023, July 13). *orf*. Retrieved from In the Maldives, Domestic Politics is Causing China to Lose Ground: <https://www.orfonline.org/research/in-the-maldives-domestic-politics-is-causing-china-to-lose-ground>
- Shivamurthy, A. G. (2025, July 24). *orf*. Retrieved from The Modi-Muizzu Playbook for Changing India-Maldives Relations: <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-modi-muizzu-playbook-for-changing-india-maldives-relations>
- Singh, S. (2022, April). *China and Asia*. Retrieved from MALDIVES-CHINA RELATIONS: <https://orcasia.org/article/202/maldives-china-relations>
- Sreenivas, U. U. (2024). India-China Geopolitical Tensions: Strategic and National Security Implications with respect to Maldives". *Peninsula Journal of Strategy and Policy*.
- Sultana, D. G. (2024). Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy of the Maldives: Implications for India. *National Security*.