India-China Geopolitical Tensions: Strategic and National Security Implications with respect to Maldives

Uttara Umesh M. & Aishwarya Sreenivas

ABSTRACT

The geopolitical landscape of the Indian Ocean is undergoing significant shifts, with the changing political dynamics in the Maldives, the evolving India-China relationship, and India's strategic moves in the Lakshadweep archipelago. This paper examines the intricate interplay between domestic politics, regional alliances, and strategic concerns in the Indian Ocean, focusing on the implications for India's national security. The Lakshadweep-Maldives-Chagos archipelago has historically been strategically important to India, and recent developments, such as the establishment of India's second naval facility in the Lakshadweep and the political shift in the Maldives, have brought this region into the spotlight. The changing India-China relationship, fuelled by China's growing influence in the Maldives and India's historical ties with the previous Maldivian administration, has raised concerns about the potential creation of a power vacuum in the Indian Ocean. The Maldivian President's call for the withdrawal of Indian troops from the country could potentially favour China's influence and jeopardize vital sea routes, increasing the risks of instability, piracy, terrorism, and other criminal activities. India's proactive diplomacy under its "Neighbourhood First Policy" aims to sustain its image as a great power while countering China's rise in the region. This research explores the relationship between China and the Maldives, its implications for India, and the patterns of investment by both India and China in the Maldives. The broader implications of the India-China geopolitical conflict on India's national security in international waters are also examined.

Key words: China, India, Maldives, Indian Ocean.

INTRODUCTION

The complexity of the geopolitical landscape in the Indian Ocean is becoming evident with political shifts in the Maldives, India's evolving relationship with China, and strategic moves by the Indian Prime Minister regarding Lakshadweep. This raises questions about the impact of these developments on national security.

Over the years, the attitudes of the Maldivian government towards India have fluctuated based on the ruling party in Male. The Maldives transitioned from a long-standing autocracy to a multi-party constitutional democracy in 2008 (US Department of State, 2023). India gained significant favor with President Maumoon Abdulla Gayoom from the Dhivehi Rayyithunge Party following its prompt response to the 1988 coup against him. In 2008, the parliament enacted a new constitution, replacing the 1998 Constitution and enabling the first multi-party presidential elections. Although Gayoom contested, Mohamed Nasheed, a pro-India candidate from the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), won. Nasheed's term was marked by domestic crises, leading to his resignation in 2012. During Abdulla Yameen's tenure with the Progressive Party of Maldives and its ruling coalition, China gained significant influence in the Maldives, striking major infrastructure deals and free trade agreements with Beijing. Yameen was succeeded by Ibrahim Mohamed Solih from MDP, to which former President Nasheed belonged. After this, India's relations with the Maldives stabilised, and India made significant investments in the Maldives to regain its influence in the region. During that time, Yameen's party launched an "India-out" campaign, which lobbied to limit India's influence in the area and strengthen China's presence. This sentiment was solidified after the 2023 elections with President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu's appointment to office.

China's growing influence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is a source of concern for India, particularly in relation to the strategically vital Maldives. Given its position near India's west coast, the Maldives are crucial for trade, with two critical sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) located at its northern and southern ends: the Gulf of Aden and the Gulf of Hormuz to the north, and the Strait of Malacca to the south. These routes are of paramount importance for global maritime trade, and for India in particular, as approximately 50% of its external trade and 80% of its energy imports traverse these SLOCs (VIF Brief, 2021). India's heightened engagement with the Maldives is linked to increased maritime activity and trade in the Indian Ocean, as well as its aim to promote regional peace and stability. The Maldives is also central to India's SAGAR vision.

The political rivalry between India and China, two major Asian powers, has intensified since the 20th century, and this competition has extended to strategic investments in the IOR. The Maldives is the latest example of this regional power struggle.

The archipelago comprising Lakshadweep, Maldives, and Chagos has historically held strategic significance for India. The visit of the Indian Prime Minister to Lakshadweep in 2024,

which followed the Maldivian presidential elections, signalled a shift in India's strategy towards the new Maldivian government for its pro-China stance. After the visit, there was a call for Indian tourists to boycott the Maldives in favour of Lakshadweep. The Maldivian President's demand for the withdrawal of Indian troops from the region came amid rising tensions. This would create a power vacuum in the Indian Ocean, enhancing China's influence and posing a threat to vital sea routes. In a quick response, India established its second naval base (INS Jatayu) in the southernmost Lakshadweep Island, in close proximity to the Maldives. The proximity of the region to Somalia and Yemen raises concerns about increased instability and risks to regional security, including piracy, terrorism, and other criminal activities.

This paper analyses the interplay between domestic politics, regional alliances, and strategic concerns in the Indian Ocean, focusing on the China-Maldives relationship and its implications for India, particularly in terms of investment patterns. It examines the broader geopolitical conflict between India and China and its potential impact on India's national security in international waters.

A. INDIA'S STRATEGIC INTERESTS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) plays a critical role in global geopolitics and power rivalries. Throughout the Cold War, the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans were the primary theatres of conflict. However, Southeast Asia was not considered a significant threat. In recent years, the focus has shifted to the East and South Chinese Seas, where there is considerable geopolitical turmoil (Mukherjee, 2017). In response to the lurking threat posed by China and the emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a new arena of competition, India has begun to build up its capacity and take a more forward-leaning stance (CFR, 2023).

The economic growth of India and China has fueled much of the geopolitical rivalry in the IOR. With a population of over one billion people, the demand for raw materials, energy, access to markets, and overall trade with other countries has increased (Mukherjee, 2017). Over half of the world's maritime oil trade passes through the IOR, and China, the world's largest goods trader, relies on ocean routes for 90% of its trade. In 2012, the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) adopted a policy of "Building a Strong Maritime Country" in recognition of the importance of maritime trade (Hui & Xianyu, 2016).

More than 90% of India's external trade by volume and 70% by value are conducted through sea

China's interest in the IOR consists of three elements: the Belt and Road Initiative, a Naval Modernisation Programme, and obtaining greater access to ports in the IOR. This is achieved mainly by granting economic and military assistance to countries in the IOR. China emerged as the largest source of economic and military aid to Sri Lanka (during the crisis), Bangladesh, and Pakistan. It also acquired its first overseas port base in Djibouti, Africa, allowing it to operate near the Straits of Hormuz, a critical checkpoint in the IOR (Mukherjee, 2017).

The importance of maritime trade in India is increasingly recognized as a crucial factor for sustaining economic progress. More than 90% of India's external trade by volume and 70% by value are conducted through sea routes (Mukherjee, 2017). India's strategy in the Indo-Pacific region encompasses three key aspects. Firstly, India has strengthened its ties with the United States of America, Japan, and Australia. Over the past decade, there has been a significant positive shift in US-India defence relations. In 2015, the Indian government approved the Defence Framework Agreement, and in 2016, the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) was signed. Furthermore, the US has agreed to assist India in building its next-generation aircraft carriers (White House, 2022). Japan has also offered to support the development of power supplies in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (JICA, 2022). In addition, strong bilateral relations are being developed with Australia.

Secondly, India's "Neighbourhood First" foreign policy aims to strengthen relations with neighbouring countries and IOR states. This policy is based on the idea that fostering relationships within the region is in India's best interests. India seeks to emerge as a "Net Security Provider" in the IOR, as outlined in its SAGAR policy (ORF, 2024). As part of this outreach, India has provided significant military, emergency, and development support to island nations such as the Maldives, Mauritius, and Seychelles. This includes improving maritime domain awareness (MDA).

Currently, Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) necessitates the assembly, correlation, and synthesis of surveillance data gathered from a variety of sources, such as satellites, radar, reconnaissance planes, or human intelligence, to detect and identify actors exhibiting irregular or threatening behaviour. In this regard, the Quad comprising the US, India, Japan, and Australia made a significant move by establishing the Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain

Awareness Initiative (IPMDA). A crucial objective of IPMDA is to tackle Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing concerns. Furthermore, India's Maritime Domain Awareness is attempting to address the rise in piracy and sea robbery incidents in the Indian Ocean Region, particularly in the Gulf of Aden. The threat of maritime terrorism intensified with the Israel-Palestine War and disruptions in maritime trade in the region. Additionally, the trafficking of contraband, such as drugs, humans, and arms, occurs primarily in the northwestern part of the IOR, along a route that extends from the Makran Coast to Maldives, Sri Lanka, Seychelles, and East Africa. (VIF, 2021). Moreover, India is monitoring China's increased military presence in the eastern Indian Ocean maritime domain, which can be attributed to the latter sending warships to the Gulf of Aden in 2008 for anti-piracy duties (White, 2020).

Lastly, India's naval modernisation, after years of delays, is gathering pace with acquisition of new ships and armaments. Whilst India's capacities in the IOR are reasonable, efforts to develop maritime assets are a step towards mitigating impediments. For example, the Navy's defence budget continues to increase every year. The portion of the Navy's budget devoted to purchasing new platforms and equipment increased by 45 per cent in 2022 alone, with most of this year's defence budget going to the Navy. It should be noted that most of this budget is spent on capacity development and not on cost (CFR, 2023). In line with this, the Indian Naval Indigenisation Plan envisions achieving self-reliance in maintaining and supporting its vital assets with indigenous production and development to counter import costs, embargoes, and procurement issues by foreign countries on a long-term basis (Indian Navy).

Recently, the Indian Navy commissioned a naval base named INS Jatayu on the Minicoy Island in Lakshadweep. The base marks the beginning of a phased expansion plan to bolster India's visibility and security near the nine-degree channel and major sea lanes of communication. The aim is to monitor the region's heavy maritime traffic and significantly improve maritime domain awareness. Furthermore, it aims to extend capacity building, operational reach, and sustenance in the area, thereby strengthening the Indian Navy's foothold on the Lakshadweep islands. (The Hindu, 2024)

B. CHINA'S INVESTMENTS IN THE IOR AND MALDIVES

In the post-colonial era, the relationships between China and each South Asian country have evolved uniquely in terms of international relations, geostrategic positioning, domestic politics, and economic conditions. China shares borders with all South Asian countries, except

Bangladesh and the island states of Sri Lanka and the Maldives (Anwar, 2020). These nations attract China due to their economic potential and young demographics.

China has implemented an ambitious investment strategy in Asia, Europe, and Africa. Its interests in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) are evidenced by its investments in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. The central element of this strategy is the 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI), a term coined by Xi Jinping at the start of his tenure, inspired by the Han Dynasty Silk Road, trading routes that connected ancient China to the Mediterranean world. The BRI comprises the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road. Under this initiative, 138 countries have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with China (EBRD). This involves significant investment and development projects, such as the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka and the 'China-Pakistan Economic Corridor' (CPEC), which links Pakistan's Gwadar port on the Arabian Sea with Kashgar in China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. Investments in this project exceed $60 billion, encompassing airports, railways, highways, and pipelines, among other trade and energy infrastructure (World Economic Forum, 2023). Additionally, the Gwadar port is leased to the Chinese state-run China Overseas Ports Holding Company (COPHC) for 40 years (Dinesh, 2021), exemplifying China's interest in the IOR, as discussed in Part A.

PENINSULA FOUNDATION

Following the maritime route down south, China's investment in the Maldives is estimated between $1.1 billion and $1.4 billion. Such economic engagements serve Chinese strategic ends and help expand their influence in the traditional Indian strategic backyard. Maldives have also been receptive to Chinese infrastructure loans and political persons expressing pro-China leaning (Pal, 2021).

China's significant infrastructure project in the Maldives includes the Sinamale Bridge, also known as the "Friendship" Bridge. The concept of connecting Male, Hulhule, and Hulhumale emerged in 2007 and remained a pivotal campaign promise in the 2008 elections. The bridge materialized under President Abdullah Yameen's administration (2013-2018), leveraging aspects of the BRI to enhance capital connectivity. However, the project faced controversy, including a corruption scandal leading to Yameen's electoral defeat and imprisonment. Additional issues involved environmental degradation, threats to marine life, international entanglements, and foreign debt, heightening concerns about Maldivian national identity (Saeedh & Feener, 2024).

China is the Maldives' third-largest export partner, closely followed by India (World Bank, 2024). In 2022, bilateral trade reached US$451.35 million, a 10.1% increase from the previous year, with China's exports at US$451.29 million compared to US$60,000 from the Maldives. The Maldives' tourism sector, heavily reliant on visitors, saw about 284,000 Chinese tourists in 2019, representing 16.7% of total foreign tourists (IDSA, 2024). In February 2023, both countries agreed on a mutual free visa policy.

Under President Yameen, the Maldives signed a Free Trade Agreement with China. However, its implementation faced challenges as his successor, Former President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, deemed the agreement's terms unfavourable for the Maldives (NUS-ISAS, 2023).

The Muizzu government has pledged to implement the trade agreements. Since President Mohammed Muizzu's inauguration in November 2023, his pro-China and anti-India stance has shaped the nation's diplomacy. This is evident from the Maldives president's recent visit to China from January 8-12, 2024, marking the first foreign dignitary visit to China that year (IDSA, 2024). During the visit, Muizzu promoted Maldivian tourism to Chinese audiences, following derogatory remarks by Maldivian ministers about the Indian Prime Minister's visit to Lakshadweep (The Economic Times, 2024).

On January 10, 2024, the Maldives and China signed 20 significant agreements, enhancing bilateral relations. These agreements included MOUs on deepening Blue Economy Cooperation, digital economy investment, green development, the Social Housing Project on Fushidhiggaru Falhu, the expansion of VIA, Fisheries Products Processing Factories, the redevelopment of Male' and Villimale' roads, and tourism cooperation (President's Office, Republic of Maldives, 2024).

Key agreements attracting global attention are: "Grant Assistance between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Republic of Maldives," the "Action Plan for Building a China-Maldives Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership (2024-2028)," and the "MoU on Jointly Accelerating the Formulation of the Cooperation Plan on the Belt and Road Initiative" (The President's Office, Republic of Maldives, 2024).

China views the Maldives as a crucial country in its maritime diplomacy because of its strategic location in the Indian Ocean. Generally, China's economic interests are more significant in Africa and the Middle East than in South Asia. This points to China's more outstanding strategic

interests in the IOR, which may soon be realized with its growing favourable ties to the current Maldivian government.

C. INDIA'S INVESTMENTS IN MALDIVES

The sharp rise in China's investments in the IOR challenges India's regional security. India must protect its position in the IOR amid declining diplomatic ties with China. In response to China's increased activity, India has also boosted its investments and strengthened maritime policies in the IOR.

India and the Maldives share a long history of cultural, economic, and political ties, with Indians forming the second-largest expatriate group in the Maldives and significantly contributing to the tourism sector. In 2019, the countries signed a Bilateral Agreement on the Exemption of Visa Requirements for Diplomatic and Official Passport Holders, enhancing cultural exchange. However, these relations face challenges from China's growing economic influence and pro-China sentiments.

India-Maldives relations are also viewed through investment and trade agreements, with comprehensive trade agreements since 1981 leading to increased trade and free-trade agreements with other South Asian countries since 2004. From 1988 to 2008, under President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, India enjoyed favourable ties with the Maldives without Chinese interference. India's swift response with "Operation Cactus" during the 1988 Maldives coup fostered trust and long-term bilateral relations. This changed in 2013 under Presidents Mohammed Waheed Hassan and Abdulla Yameen, who welcomed Chinese aid and investment. However, despite "India-out" sentiments rising and fading in the Maldives, India has provided extensive economic assistance. It has undertaken bilateral infrastructure, health, telecommunications, and labour resource development programs. Some of India's significant projects have been completed or are in progress, including the Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital, built with India Grant Assistance in 1995.

A significant hospital renovation was completed in 2017 at INR 52Cr, funded by the Government of India (GoI) (MEA, 2023). The Maldives Institute of Technical Education (also known as Maldives Polytechnic) was set up and completed at a cost of 12Cr INR after a MoU was signed between the countries in 1992.(MEA, 2023).

Along with the India-Maldives Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Studies (launched in 2002 and officially handed to the Government of Maldives in 2014) and the Technology Adoption Program in the Education Sector in Maldives (2013), the most recent development project undertaken by India is the National College for Police and Law Enforcement (NCPLE). This is the largest project undertaken by India at a cost of INR 222.98Cr (MEA, 2023).

Following the general elections of 2019, India's new administration sought to counter Chinese influence and strengthen ties with the Maldives. In 2019, India provided INR 50 Cr to support socio-economic development projects in the education, health, and community development sectors, which were announced during the visit of the Indian External Affairs Minister (MEA, 2023). All of these projects have since been completed. During the same visit, an MoU for MVR 85 million in grant assistance was signed for High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs) through Local Bodies, with an additional MVR 100 million MoU signed in 2023. India also funded the restoration of Male's Hukuru Miskiiy (Friday Mosque) with an INR 8.95 Cr grant.

In March 2019, a Credit Line Agreement was signed between the Government of India, Government of Maldives, and EXIM Bank of India for "Infrastructure and Connectivity Projects under EXIM Bank Line of Credit of US$ 800 million" (MEA, 2023). The projects covered by this agreement included water and sanitation development in 34 islands, the Addu Development Project for roads and land reclamation to establish Addu as the "southern regional hub," expansion of Maldives Industrial Fisheries Company Limited (MIFCO) facilities, the Cancer Hospital, Gulhifalhu Port project, Hulhumale Cricket Stadium, airport redevelopment projects in Hanimaadhoo and Gan, and the Greater Male Connectivity Project (GMCP) (MEA, 2023).

The recent 2023 elections in the Maldives and President Mohamed Muizzu's victory pose challenges for India due to the new government's inclination towards China. The India-Maldives Trade Agreement of 1988 facilitates trade in essential goods. India imports 55 commodities from the Maldives (primarily scrap iron) and exports 1957 commodities (including minerals, machinery and electricals, vegetables, chemicals, pharma, and base metals). Total trade crossed $500 million for the first time in 2022. In 2023, India’s exports to Maldives was $ 543.83 million while imports from Maldives was $ 5.14 million (National Investment Promotion & Facilitation Agency 2022 and 2023). In FY 2021-22, India was the

Maldives' third-largest trade partner, was the 2nd largest trade partner in 2022, and the largest trade partner in 2023..

Another dimension of India-Maldives relations is defence and security. In 2016, an Action Plan for Defence was signed to strengthen this partnership (MEA, 2023). India provides training to the Maldivian National Defence Force (MNDF), covering up to 70% of their needs. Over a decade, more than 1500 MNDF trainees have been trained in India. Activities include EEZ patrols, anti-narcotic operations, sea-rider programs, adventure camps, HADR exercises, and Pollution Control. The Indian Navy has supplied MNDF with air assets for surveillance, MEDEVAC, SAR, and heli-borne vertical insertion (MEA, 2023). Defence cooperation extends to joint exercises, Maritime Domain Awareness, hardware gifting, and infrastructure development (MEA, 2023). Key projects include the Composite Training Centre, the Coastal Radar System, and a new Ministry of Defence Headquarters (MEA, 2023). In 2022, India announced the supply of a replacement ship for CGS-Huravee, 24 vehicles, and a second Landing Craft Assault to MNDF, just before the Maldives' Presidential elections (MEA, 2023). These investments reflect a strategic partnership with economic considerations.

CONCLUSION

"The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting" - Sun Tzu

The Indian Ocean Region has traditionally been a site of regional disagreements, ranging from local power struggles to proxy wars. In the 21st century, these disputes have shifted to a psychological domain, with an emphasis on strategic naval presence and tactical exercises. China's maritime ambitions are apparent in its assertiveness in the South China Sea and its growing influence in the Gulf of Aden. Similarly, India is worried about China's increasing investments in the Maldives, just as it was concerned about the construction of Sri Lanka's Hambantota port.

The opaqueness of Chinese financial aid and development projects poses a threat to recipient nations and neighboring powers. India is struggling to discern China's true intentions and long-term plans. India's concerns are justified, as evidenced by the arrival of the Chinese research ship Xiang Yang Hong 03 in the Maldives shortly after a 20-point agreement. Civilian ships had spent more than three weeks surveying waters near the exclusive economic zones of India, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka, raising security alarms. Although China claims the ship's activities

are for 'peaceful purposes,' the potential for sharing research data with the military cannot be ignored in this geopolitically sensitive region (Reuters, 2024). Similar incidents have occurred, with an estimated 16 Chinese ships frequenting the Indian Ocean (Reuters, 2024). Notably, the Yuan Wang 5, a military vessel capable of tracking rocket and missile launches, docked in Colombo in 2022, causing unease in India (Reuters, 2024).

The strategic location of Maldives between the Strait of Hormuz and the Strait of Malacca has drawn the attention of rival naval powers. The Strait of Hormuz, which is critical for global oil flow, with an average of 21 million barrels per day in 2022, equivalent to 21% of global petroleum consumption, has made it a focal point for competition between China and India. Any disruption in oil transport through this strait can lead to significant supply delays and higher shipping costs, resulting in an energy crisis for the other country. Moreover, the strait is vital for goods trade between Europe and Asia, as evidenced by pirate attacks from Somalia and Yemen.

The Strait of Malacca connects major economies such as the Middle East, China, Japan, and South Korea, providing the shortest shipping route between the Indian and Pacific oceans. Any blockage here would result in financial and psychological losses, wasting time and resources. The strait handles 80% of Northeast Asia's oil imports and a third of global traded goods, including Chinese exports (Qu and Meng, 2012). Both China and India have vested interests in monitoring regional military activities in the Strait of Malacca.

India views pro-China relations in the Maldives as enhancing China's maritime presence, posing security threats in the Western Indian Ocean Region (IOR). However, this tension is unlikely to escalate to open conflict, as both countries have been engaged in diplomatic talks to resolve their differences.

References

Aktar, S., & Pailan, S. (2022, March 1). India-Maldives Relations: Its flux through decades. https://www.jetir.org/view?paper-JETIR2203060

Anwar, A. (Ed.). (2023). Hindsight, Insight, Foresight: Thinking About Security in the Indo-Pacific: Part II: The Changing Faces of Regional Security; SOUTH ASIA AND CHINA'S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE: SECURITY IMPLICATIONS AND WAYS FORWARD. Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center For Security Studies. https://dkiapcss.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/10-Anwar-25thA.pdf

Bateman, S., Gamage, R., & Chan, J. (Eds.). (2017). ASEAN AND THE INDIAN OCEAN: THE KEY MARITIME LINKS. Ch 3 21-26. S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies. http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep05888

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). (2023) European Bank for Reconstruction and Development https://www.ebrd.com/what-we-do/belt-and-road/overview.html#:~:text=China' s%20Belt %20and%20Road,trade%20and%20stimulating%20economic%20growth

China's Belt and Road Initiative turns 10. Here's what to know. (2023, November 20). World Economic Forum. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/11/china-belt-road-initiative-trade-bri-silkroad/#:~:text=One%20of%20the%20largest%20and,western%20Xinjiang%20Uygur%20Aut onomous%20Region

Didi, R. M. (2022, November 21). The Maldives' tug of war over India and national security. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/11/21/maldives-tug-of-war-over-india-and-national-security-pub-88418

Dinesh, S. (2021). Strategic Salience of the Gwadar Port: An Analytical Study (1st ed., Vol. 15). Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses Journal of Defence Studies. https://www.idsa.in/system/files/jds/jds-15-1-2021-Sindhu-Dinesh.pdf

Feener, R. M., & Saeedh, T. (2024). Spectral encounters on the Sinamale Bridge: Affective infrastructure along a watery stretch of the Belt Road: Vol. 82(2)-275-300. https://www.pure.ed.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/410703087/SaeedhTFeenerR2024AESp

Government of India. (2022a). Bilateral Trade Report: Maldives. In Invest India: National Agency (FY. 2021-22). Investment Promotion & Facilitation https://static.investindia.gov.in/s3fs-public/2021-22/Maldives.pdf

Government of India. (2022b). Bilateral Trade Report: Maldives. In Invest India: National Investment Promotion & Facilitation Agency (FY. 2022-23). https://static.investindia.gov.in/s3fs-public/2022-23/Maldives.pdf

India is Embracing a 'Net Security Provider' Role in the Indian Ocean Region. (2023). orfonline.org. https://www.orfonline.org/research/india-is-embracing-a-net-security-provider-role-in-the -Indian-ocean-region

JICA signs grant agreement of 4 billion Yen (INR 250 crores approx.) with the Government of India for the 'Project for the Improvement of Power Supply in Andaman and Nicobar Islands' | India Countries & Regions T JICA. (2023). https://www.jica.go.jp/Resource/india/english/office/topics/press220330.html#:~:text=New%20Delhi%2C%20March%2030%2C%202022,in%20Andaman%20and%20Nicobar%20Islands

Key Agreements exchanged between the Maldives and China | The President's Office. (n.d.)The President's Office. https://presidency.gov.mv/Press/Article/29600 Krause, J., & Bruns, S. (2016). Routledge Handbook of Naval Strategy and Security. In Routledge eBooks. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315732572

Kumar, A. (2023). Maldives' President's China visit | Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. https://www.idsa.in/issuebrief/Maldives-President-China-Visit-AKumar-050224 Maldives - United States Department of State. (2023, December 7). United States Department of State. https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-investment-climate-statements/maldives/

Maldives Trade | WITS Data. (2023). https://wits.worldbank.org/CountrySnapshot/en/MDV Maldivian President Muizzu is choosing China over India: What is at play? (2024, January 11).The Economic Times. https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/maldivian-president-muizzu-is-choosing-china-over-india-what-is-a play/articleshow/106704172.cms?from=mdr

Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) in the Indo-Pacific and the Way Ahead for Indo-Pacific Partnership for MDA (IPMDA). (2023). Vivekananda International Foundation.

https://www.vifindia.org/article/2023/june/27/Maritime-Domain-Awareness-in-the-Indo Pacific-and-the-Way-Ahead

Miller, M. C. (2023, July 18). India's efforts to strengthen Indian Ocean security. Council on Foreign https://www.cfr.org/blog/indias-efforts-strengthen-indian-ocean-security Relations. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. (2023). India-Maldives Bilateral Relations. Ministry of External Affairs. https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Bilateral Maldives.pdf

Pal, D. (2021). China's Influence in South Asia: Vulnerabilities and Resilience in Four Countries. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. https://carnegieendowment.org/files/202110-Pal_SouthAsiaChina_finall.pdf

Palit, A. (2023). The Maldives-China FTA: Grave Economic Consequences (No. 1086) National University of Singapore: Institute of South Asian Studies. https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/ISAS-Brief-1086-ISAS.pdf

Pandalai, S. (2023). QUAD's maritime Domain awareness initiative needs time to deliver | Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. https://idsa.in/idsacomments/Quads-Maritime-Domain-240622

Peri, D. (2024, March 6). Navy commissions INS Jatayu at Minicoy, MH-60R helicopter squadron at Kochi. The Hindu. https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/ins-jatayu-indias-new-naval-base-in-lakshadweep-will-help-combat-piracy-security-threats better/article67920389.ece

PTI. (2024, January 11). Maldives, China sign 20 agreements after Muizzu-Xi meeting amid diplomatic row with India. The Hindu. https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/maldives-china-sign-20-agreements-after-muizzu-xi-meeting-amid-diplomatic-row-with-india/article67728474.ece

Qu, X., & Meng, Q. (1999). The economic importance of the Straits of Malacca and Singapore: An extreme-scenario analysis (No. 48, 258-265). Transportation Research Part E-logistics and Transportation Review. https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/143891295.pdf

Ranjan, A. (2019). The Maldives: Politics of an Island Nation (Vol. 5). South Asia Scan, National University of Singapore: Institute of South Asian Studies. https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/South-Asia-Scan-Vol-5-Full.pdf

The Strait of Hormuz is the world's most important oil transit chokepoint Information Administration (EIA). -U.S. Energy (2023) https://www.cia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=61002#:~:text=the%20Arabian%20Sea .-,The%20Strait%20of%20Hormuz%20is%20the%20world's%20most%20important%20oil,of%20global%20petroleum%20liquids%20consumption

Vision and Mission (2023) Indian Navy. https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/vision-and-objectives

Vasisht, C. (December, 2021) India-Maldives Policy Brief. https://www.vifindia.org/print/9592

White House (2023, January 31). FACT SHEET: United States and India Elevate Strategic Partnership with the initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET). The White House. https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/01/31/fact-sheet-united-states-and-india-elevate-strategic-partnership-with-the-initiative-on-critical-and-emerging-technology-icet/ ctralEncounters.pdf

White, J. T. Global China: Assessing China's Growing Role in the World. (2020). CHINA'S INDIAN OCEAN AMBITIONS: INVESTMENT, INFLUENCE, AND MILITARY ADVANTAGE [Pdf]. www.brookings.edu. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/FP_20200615_chinas_indian_ocean ambitions white-1.pdf

Woo, R. (2024, February). Maldives visit of Chinese survey ship could rouse Indian Ocean security concerns. Reuters. https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/maldives-visit-chinese-survey-ship-could-trigger-indian-ocean-security-concerns-2024-02-22/

Zhang, A., & Woo, R. (2024, February). Chinese research vessels operating in the Indian Ocean. Reuters. https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/chinese-research-vessels-operating-indian-ocean-2024-02-22/

Image Credits: worldatlas.com

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Uttara Umesh recently completed her under-graduation in BSc Economics from Mount Carmel College. She is currently pursuing a Masters (MA) in Economics at Azim Premji University (2024-2026). She is an International Relations, Geopolitics and Development Studies enthusiast. She has written on related issues for the college Economics Association's Newsletter, which will be published at the end of this academic year.



Aishwarya Sreenivas recently graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Economics and Mathematics from Mount Carmel College. Her academic interests encompass Economics, International Relations, and History. She has actively pursued these interests by attending conferences on Behavioral Economics, the Indian economy, and cross-disciplinary research approaches.

THE PENINSULA FOUNDATION