

India-Maldives Relationship: Similarities of National Interest

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Abstract: The bilateral relationship between India and the Republic of Maldives represents a paradigmatic example of how geographical proximity, historical ties, and convergent national interests shape contemporary diplomatic engagement in the Indian Ocean region. This study examines the multifaceted dimensions of Indo-Maldivian relations, focusing on the convergence of national interests that has sustained their partnership despite periodic diplomatic challenges. Through comprehensive analysis of economic cooperation, security collaboration, and strategic alignment, this research demonstrates how both nations have navigated complex geopolitical dynamics while maintaining core shared objectives. The paper utilizes recent data from 2024-2025 to illustrate the resilience of bilateral ties, particularly following the diplomatic recalibration that occurred after initial strains in early 2024. The findings reveal that despite occasional divergences in approach, both countries maintain fundamentally aligned interests in maritime security, economic development, regional stability, and cultural preservation. This research contributes to the understanding of small state-large state dynamics in South Asian geopolitics and provides insights into how shared national interests can override temporary political disagreements to sustain long-term strategic partnerships.

Keywords: India-Maldives relations, national interests, maritime security, economic cooperation, Indian Ocean geopolitics, bilateral diplomacy.

1. Introduction

The relationship between India and the Maldives exemplifies the complex interplay between geographical proximity, historical connections, and evolving national interests in contemporary international relations. As neighboring nations separated by merely 600 kilometers of the Arabian Sea, these two countries have maintained a relationship that extends far beyond mere geographical convenience. The significance of this bilateral partnership has grown exponentially in recent decades, particularly as both nations navigate the changing dynamics of Indo-Pacific geopolitics and the increasing strategic importance of the Indian Ocean region.

The Maldives, comprising 1,192 coral islands scattered across approximately 90,000 square kilometers of ocean, occupies a strategically vital position along major international shipping lanes that facilitate nearly 50% of global container traffic and 70% of petroleum product shipments destined for Asia (Khurana, 2019). This geographical positioning makes the archipelago nation critical to India's maritime security calculus and broader regional strategic objectives. Conversely, India's emergence as a regional power and its commitment to the "Neighborhood First" policy has made it an indispensable partner for the Maldives in addressing developmental challenges and security concerns.

The bilateral relationship has demonstrated remarkable resilience, weathering various political transitions and diplomatic challenges. The Maldives Foreign Minister Mr. Moosa Zammer visited India in May 2024, signaling a willingness to reset relations and pursue economic and strategic engagement following tensions that emerged earlier in the year. This diplomatic recalibration underscores the fundamental importance both nations place on maintaining stable and cooperative relations despite periodic political disagreements.

The theoretical framework for understanding this relationship rests on the concept of convergent national interests, where two sovereign states find their core strategic, economic, and security objectives naturally aligned despite differences in size, population, and economic capacity. This paper argues that the enduring nature of India-Maldives relations stems not merely from geographical proximity or historical ties, but from a deep structural alignment of national interests that transcends individual political leadership and short-term policy variations.

2. Literature Review

The academic literature on India-Maldives relations has evolved considerably over the past two decades, reflecting the growing strategic importance of the relationship and the broader Indian Ocean region. Early scholarly works primarily focused on the historical and cultural dimensions of the relationship, emphasizing shared linguistic roots, religious connections, and colonial experiences under British rule (Phadnis & Luithui, 1985). These foundational studies established the importance of people-to-people connections and cultural affinity as stabilizing factors in bilateral relations.

Contemporary scholarship has shifted toward analyzing the geopolitical and strategic dimensions of the relationship, particularly in the context of China's expanding presence in the Indian Ocean region. Brewster (2019) provides a comprehensive analysis of how India's maritime strategy has evolved to address challenges posed by China's Belt and Road Initiative, with particular attention to the role of smaller Indian Ocean states like the Maldives. This work establishes the theoretical framework for understanding how great power competition influences the strategic calculations of smaller states in the region.

The economic dimensions of the relationship have received increasing scholarly attention, particularly following the significant expansion of trade relations in recent years. Trade between the two nations has grown substantially—from crossing the USD 300 million mark in 2021 to exceeding USD 500 million in 2022, indicating the deepening economic interdependence between the countries. Scholarly analyses have examined how this economic cooperation serves broader strategic objectives for both nations (Rajesh, 2020).

Recent academic discourse has also focused on the role of climate change and environmental cooperation in shaping bilateral relations. Given the Maldives' extreme vulnerability to sea-level rise and India's commitment to renewable energy transitions, scholars have identified environmental cooperation as an emerging pillar of the relationship (Singh & Nayak, 2021). This literature emphasizes how shared environmental challenges create additional areas of convergent national interest.

The diplomatic dimensions of the relationship have been extensively analyzed, particularly focusing on how both countries have managed periodic tensions while maintaining overall cooperative frameworks. Academic analysis of the 2024 diplomatic challenges and subsequent reconciliation provides valuable insights into the resilience mechanisms embedded within the bilateral relationship (Jaishankar, 2024).

3. Theoretical Framework

This study employs a neo-realist theoretical framework combined with elements of liberal institutionalism to understand the dynamics of India-Maldives relations. The neo-realist perspective emphasizes how structural factors, particularly the distribution of power in the international system and geographical constraints, shape state behavior and bilateral relationships. From this perspective,

the alignment of India-Maldives interests reflects rational calculations by both states regarding their position in the regional security architecture and the need to balance competing external pressures.

The concept of "strategic autonomy" provides additional theoretical grounding for this analysis. Both India and the Maldives, despite their vastly different capabilities, demonstrate commitment to maintaining independent foreign policy decision-making while engaging constructively with multiple partners. This shared preference for strategic autonomy creates natural convergence in their approach to regional and global issues.

Liberal institutional theory contributes to understanding how formal and informal institutions, agreements, and cooperative frameworks facilitate sustained cooperation despite power asymmetries. The extensive network of bilateral agreements, institutional mechanisms, and cooperative frameworks between India and the Maldives exemplifies how institutionalized cooperation can overcome structural challenges inherent in relationships between states of dramatically different sizes and capabilities.

The theoretical framework also incorporates elements of complex interdependence theory, which emphasizes how multiple channels of contact, absence of hierarchy among issues, and reduced role of military force characterize modern interstate relationships. The India-Maldives relationship demonstrates these characteristics through its multi-sectoral engagement, regular high-level political dialogue, and emphasis on cooperative rather than coercive approaches to dispute resolution.

4. Methodology

This research employs a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative analysis of diplomatic documents, policy statements, and scholarly sources with quantitative analysis of economic data, trade statistics, and development indicators. The study period focuses primarily on developments from 2020-2025, with particular attention to the diplomatic recalibration that occurred following initial tensions in early 2024.

Primary data sources include official government documents, bilateral agreements, joint statements, and policy declarations from both the Government of India and the Government of the Maldives. Secondary sources encompass academic publications, think tank reports, and analyses by regional experts and policy practitioners. Economic data is drawn from official trade statistics, central bank reports, and international financial institution databases.

The analytical approach employs structured comparative analysis to identify patterns of convergence and divergence in national interests across different policy domains. This methodology allows for systematic examination of how similar national interests manifest across economic, security, cultural, and environmental dimensions of the bilateral relationship.

Case study methodology is employed to examine specific instances of cooperation and challenge, including the 2024 diplomatic tensions and subsequent reconciliation, major development projects, and security cooperation initiatives. These case studies provide detailed insights into how theoretical concepts of convergent national interests operate in practice.

5. Historical Context and Evolution

5.1 Early Foundations (1965-1988)

The diplomatic relationship between India and the Maldives was formally established in 1965 when the Maldives gained independence from British colonial rule. India was among the first nations to recognize Maldivian independence, establishing a precedent for the supportive relationship that would characterize subsequent decades. The early period of bilateral relations was marked by India's recognition of Maldivian sovereignty and commitment to non-interference in internal affairs, principles that remain fundamental to the relationship today.

During this formative period, India provided crucial support for Maldivian state-building efforts, including assistance with establishing basic administrative structures, educational institutions, and healthcare facilities. The establishment of the Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital in Malé represents

an early example of India's commitment to supporting Maldivian development priorities. This institution not only provided essential healthcare services but also served as a symbol of enduring friendship between the two nations.

5.2 Consolidation Period (1988-2008)

The relationship entered a new phase following the 1988 coup attempt in the Maldives, when India responded to a request for assistance from President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom by deploying military forces to restore constitutional order. Operation Cactus, as this intervention came to be known, demonstrated India's commitment to Maldivian sovereignty and established important precedents for security cooperation between the two nations.

The successful resolution of the 1988 crisis led to formalization of defense cooperation agreements and establishment of regular consultation mechanisms on security issues. This period also witnessed significant expansion of economic cooperation, with India becoming a major source of essential commodities for the Maldives. While India's exports to Maldives during 2006 were worth ₹384 crore, imports were worth less than ₹6 crore, indicating the complementary nature of the economic relationship even during this early period.

5.3 Democratic Transition and Expansion (2008-2018)

The transition to multi-party democracy in the Maldives in 2008 introduced new dynamics into the bilateral relationship, as democratic governments in both countries began exploring expanded areas of cooperation. This period witnessed significant diversification of the partnership beyond traditional security and economic cooperation to include climate change, renewable energy, and capacity-building initiatives.

The democratic transition also coincided with increased Chinese engagement in the Indian Ocean region, adding new complexity to the strategic environment in which both countries operated. However, rather than undermining bilateral cooperation, these external developments actually reinforced the importance both nations placed on maintaining strong bilateral ties as a foundation for navigating broader regional challenges.

5.4 Contemporary Challenges and Recalibration (2018-2025)

The most recent phase of the relationship has been characterized by both significant challenges and remarkable resilience. In January 2024, relations between ... historical and cultural ties, became strained due to derogatory remarks made by Maldivian cabinet ministers and concerns over racism directed at Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and India as a whole. These tensions led to immediate economic consequences, as Indian tourist arrivals fell from first to fifth position within a month. India also slashed aid to the Maldives by 48 per cent in its 2024 budget.

However, the rapid diplomatic recovery demonstrated the underlying strength of bilateral ties. This visit of President Muizzu in October 2024 laid the groundwork for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the Maldives in July 2025, culminating in India and the Maldives revitalised ties with a USD 565 million line of credit from India to support Maldivian infrastructure projects. This successful navigation of diplomatic challenges illustrates how deeply embedded shared interests can overcome temporary political disagreements.

6. Economic Cooperation and Trade Relations

6.1 Trade Partnership Evolution

The economic dimension of India-Maldives relations has experienced remarkable transformation over the past decade, evolving from a relatively modest trading relationship to a comprehensive economic partnership. India emerged as Maldives' 2nd largest trade partner in 2022 & the largest in 2023, demonstrating the rapid expansion and deepening of economic ties. This evolution reflects both countries' recognition that economic interdependence serves their respective national interests by creating stability and mutual prosperity.

The trade statistics reveal the complementary nature of the bilateral economic relationship. India Exports to Maldives was US\$825.06 Million during 2024, according to the United Nations COMTRADE database on international trade, representing a significant increase from previous years. The composition of this trade reflects the structural characteristics of both economies, with India providing manufactured goods, food products, and technology while the Maldives exports primarily marine products and provides services in the tourism sector.

6.2 Essential Commodities and Food Security

A critical dimension of economic cooperation involves India's role in ensuring Maldivian food security through regular supply of essential commodities. There was also an increase of 5 per cent in the quotas for eggs, potatoes, onions, sugar, rice, wheat flour and dal (pulses) and the approved quantities were the highest since the formal establishment of essential commodities trade agreements. This arrangement serves vital national interests for both countries: the Maldives secures reliable access to basic food items essential for its population, while India maintains stable export markets for agricultural and processed food products.

The essential commodities trade agreement represents more than a simple commercial arrangement; it embodies the recognition that food security constitutes a fundamental national security issue for the Maldives given its limited agricultural capacity and complete dependence on imports for basic nutrition. For India, providing this support aligns with its broader strategic objective of being recognized as a reliable and responsible regional partner.

6.3 Infrastructure Development and Investment

Infrastructure development represents another crucial area where economic cooperation serves convergent national interests. The launch of cargo vessel service ... Connectivity Project (GMCP) with a USD 400 million LoC & USD 100 million grant, renewal of essential commodities trade agreement, and, financial assistance of USD 250 million for budget support to the GoM were announced. These infrastructure investments serve multiple strategic purposes: they enhance Maldivian connectivity and development capacity while also supporting India's broader vision of regional integration and connectivity.

The Greater Malé Connectivity Project exemplifies how infrastructure cooperation advances shared interests. For the Maldives, this project addresses critical connectivity challenges that constrain economic development and quality of life for citizens. For India, supporting such initiatives demonstrates its capacity to serve as a development partner of choice for neighboring countries while also creating positive demonstration effects for other regional partners.

6.4 Financial Cooperation and Currency Support

Financial cooperation has emerged as a particularly important dimension of economic partnership, especially during periods of economic stress. India approved a \$400 million currency swap agreement to support the cash-strapped Maldivian economy, demonstrating how economic cooperation serves immediate crisis management needs while also reinforcing long-term strategic partnerships.

Currency swap agreements serve multiple functions in bilateral economic relations. They provide the Maldives with access to foreign currency reserves during periods of balance of payments pressure, while also reducing transaction costs for bilateral trade conducted in Indian rupees. For India, such agreements support its broader objective of promoting regional financial integration and reducing dependence on third-country currencies for regional trade.

7. Security Cooperation and Strategic Alignment

7.1 Maritime Security Partnership

Maritime security cooperation represents perhaps the most significant area of strategic convergence between India and the Maldives. Maldives is central to India's interests in safeguarding freedom of navigation, regional security and stability given its position along critical international shipping

lanes. This strategic importance creates natural alignment between Indian security interests and Maldivian sovereignty protection requirements.

The maritime domain presents unique challenges for the Maldives due to its dispersed geography and limited enforcement capabilities across its extensive maritime territory. India's provision of maritime surveillance assistance, naval cooperation, and capacity-building support addresses these challenges while simultaneously advancing India's own maritime security objectives in the western Indian Ocean region.

7.2 Defense Cooperation Framework

Defense cooperation between the two countries operates through multiple formal and informal channels, including regular defense consultations, training exchanges, and capability-building initiatives. The defense partnership reflects both countries' recognition that security cooperation serves mutual interests: the Maldives gains access to advanced capabilities and training opportunities, while India maintains friendly relations with a strategically located partner.

Recent developments in defense cooperation have emphasized capacity-building rather than dependency-creating relationships. This approach reflects both countries' preference for partnerships that enhance rather than compromise sovereignty and strategic autonomy. The emphasis on training, technology transfer, and institutional development creates sustainable security cooperation that serves long-term rather than short-term interests.

7.3 Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime

Cooperation in addressing transnational security challenges represents another area of natural convergence between Indian and Maldivian national interests. Both countries face challenges from drug trafficking, human trafficking, and other criminal activities that exploit maritime boundaries and transit routes. Collaborative approaches to these challenges serve both countries' domestic security interests while also contributing to broader regional stability.

The Indian Ocean region's increasing importance in global trade has unfortunately also made it attractive to various forms of transnational criminal activity. Both India and the Maldives recognize that effective responses to these challenges require sustained cooperation and information sharing. This shared recognition creates strong incentives for maintaining cooperative security frameworks even during periods of broader diplomatic tension.

8. Cultural and People-to-People Connections

8.1 Historical and Linguistic Ties

The cultural foundations of India-Maldives relations extend deep into history, with linguistic, religious, and cultural connections that predate modern state formation. The Maldivian language, Dhivehi, contains significant Sanskrit and other Indian language influences, reflecting centuries of cultural exchange and interaction. These deep cultural roots provide resilience to the bilateral relationship that purely transactional partnerships often lack.

Religious connections also play an important role, though they require careful navigation given the different constitutional arrangements in both countries. While both countries maintain secular governance principles, the shared understanding of religious diversity and tolerance creates additional bonds between societies. Cultural exchange programs, educational cooperation, and artistic collaboration all benefit from these foundational connections.

8.2 Educational Cooperation and Capacity Building

Educational cooperation represents a particularly important dimension of people-to-people connections, with India providing scholarships, technical training opportunities, and institutional support for Maldivian educational development. These programs serve multiple purposes: they develop human capital essential for Maldivian development while also creating lasting connections between the educated elites of both countries.

The scholarship programs and educational exchanges create networks of personal and professional relationships that transcend individual political leaders and government administrations. These networks provide important channels for communication and understanding during periods of political tension while also facilitating cooperation during normal periods of diplomatic engagement.

8.3 Tourism and Economic Integration

Tourism represents both an economic and cultural dimension of bilateral relations, with India historically serving as one of the largest source markets for Maldivian tourism. However, the tourism relationship also demonstrates the sensitivity of people-to-people connections to political developments. In 2024, Indians visiting Maldives declined by around 37.47% following diplomatic tensions, illustrating how political disagreements can quickly impact economic relationships mediated through individual consumer choices.

The recovery of tourism relationships following diplomatic reconciliation demonstrates the underlying resilience of people-to-people connections when supported by positive government policies. The tourism sector's rapid response to improved political relations suggests that cultural affinity and economic rationality often overcome temporary political disagreements when given opportunity to do so.

9. Environmental Cooperation and Climate Challenges

9.1 Shared Vulnerability to Climate Change

Climate change represents an existential challenge for the Maldives and a significant long-term concern for India, creating natural alignment around environmental cooperation and climate adaptation strategies. The Maldives' extreme vulnerability to sea-level rise makes climate action a core national security issue, while India's large coastal population and agricultural sector face significant climate risks that require sustained mitigation and adaptation efforts.

This shared vulnerability creates opportunities for cooperation in renewable energy development, climate adaptation technologies, and international climate diplomacy. Both countries have strong interests in supporting international climate action and accessing climate finance for adaptation and mitigation projects. These shared interests provide additional foundations for bilateral cooperation that transcend traditional security and economic considerations.

9.2 Renewable Energy Partnership

Renewable energy cooperation represents a concrete area where environmental challenges create opportunities for mutually beneficial partnership. India's advanced capabilities in solar technology and renewable energy systems complement the Maldives' strong interest in reducing dependence on imported fossil fuels and achieving carbon neutrality goals.

Recent initiatives in renewable energy cooperation include technical assistance for solar installations, capacity building for renewable energy management, and collaboration in accessing international climate finance. These partnerships serve both countries' environmental objectives while also creating economic opportunities and technological cooperation that strengthen broader bilateral ties.

9.3 Marine Conservation and Sustainable Development

Marine conservation represents another important area of environmental cooperation, given both countries' dependence on healthy marine ecosystems for economic development and food security. Collaborative approaches to marine protected area management, sustainable fishing practices, and marine pollution control serve shared interests in maintaining the health of Indian Ocean marine ecosystems.

The Indian Ocean's role as a critical global marine ecosystem makes bilateral cooperation in marine conservation relevant to broader international environmental objectives. Both countries benefit from

demonstrating leadership in marine conservation while also developing practical cooperation mechanisms that support their respective development goals.

10. Challenges and Areas of Divergence

10.1 Great Power Competition and Strategic Autonomy

One of the most significant challenges facing India-Maldives relations involves managing the impact of broader great power competition, particularly China's increasing engagement in the Indian Ocean region. Both countries must balance their bilateral partnership with their respective relationships with other major powers, creating occasional tensions and requiring careful diplomatic management.

The Maldives' commitment to strategic autonomy sometimes leads to decisions that India views as potentially problematic for regional security, while India's emphasis on regional leadership sometimes conflicts with Maldivian preferences for diversified international partnerships. However, both countries have demonstrated capacity to manage these tensions through dialogue and compromise when core interests are not threatened.

10.2 Economic Dependency Concerns

The asymmetrical nature of the economic relationship sometimes creates concerns in the Maldives about excessive dependence on India for essential supplies and development finance. These concerns are natural given the vast differences in economic size and capacity between the two countries, but they require careful management to prevent them from undermining the overall cooperative framework.

Despite receiving significant financial aid from India, the Maldives' ongoing economic crisis has led it to seek additional financial assistance from China and Gulf nations. This diversification strategy reflects legitimate Maldivian interests in maintaining multiple economic partnerships, though it sometimes creates concerns in India about long-term strategic implications of increased Chinese engagement.

10.3 Domestic Political Dynamics

Domestic political changes in both countries occasionally create challenges for bilateral cooperation, as different political parties and leaders may have varying perspectives on the appropriate scope and nature of bilateral engagement. The democratic systems in both countries ensure that foreign policy must respond to domestic political preferences, which can sometimes lead to policy variations that affect bilateral relations.

However, the fundamental strategic logic underlying bilateral cooperation has proven resilient across multiple political transitions in both countries. This resilience suggests that shared national interests provide sufficient foundation for sustained cooperation despite periodic political variations and leadership changes.

11. Future Prospects and Strategic Opportunities

11.1 Expanding Economic Integration

Future prospects for India-Maldives relations include significant opportunities for deepening economic integration through expanded trade agreements, investment partnerships, and development cooperation. The leaders also signed several Memorandums of Understanding and agreed to commence negotiations on a free trade agreement, indicating both countries' commitment to expanding economic cooperation despite recent diplomatic challenges.

A comprehensive free trade agreement could significantly expand bilateral trade by reducing barriers and creating preferential access for products and services from both countries. For the Maldives, such an agreement could provide expanded market access for marine products and services, while India could benefit from preferential access for manufactured goods and technology services.

11.2 Technology and Digital Cooperation

Emerging technologies present new opportunities for bilateral cooperation, particularly in areas such as digital governance, telecommunications infrastructure, and technology-enabled services. India's advanced capabilities in information technology and digital services complement the Maldives' interest in developing digital economy capabilities and improving governance through technology applications.

Cooperation in digital technology could include assistance with digital identity systems, e-governance platforms, digital payment systems, and cybersecurity capabilities. These forms of cooperation serve both countries' interests in modernizing governance and economic systems while also creating additional channels for bilateral engagement and cooperation.

11.3 Regional Leadership and Multilateral Cooperation

Both countries have opportunities to demonstrate regional leadership through their bilateral cooperation, particularly in areas such as climate change, sustainable development, and regional security. Both nations are now signaling their intent to build a robust and resilient security architecture in the region, as outlined in the Vision for Comprehensive Economic and Maritime Partnership declared by Muizzu and Modi in October 2024.

This vision for comprehensive partnership could serve as a model for other bilateral relationships in the region while also contributing to broader regional stability and prosperity. Both countries benefit from being viewed as constructive partners capable of managing challenges and expanding cooperation in mutually beneficial ways.

12. Policy Recommendations

12.1 Institutional Strengthening

Both countries should invest in strengthening bilateral institutional mechanisms to ensure that cooperation frameworks can withstand periodic political challenges and leadership changes. This includes establishing regular consultation mechanisms at multiple levels of government, creating permanent bilateral committees for key policy areas, and developing crisis management protocols for addressing disagreements before they escalate into broader diplomatic tensions.

Regular high-level political dialogue should be complemented by sustained engagement at working levels across multiple government departments and agencies. This multi-level engagement creates resilience by ensuring that bilateral cooperation does not depend entirely on individual political relationships or specific government administrations.

12.2 Economic Diversification and Sustainability

Both countries should work to diversify their economic cooperation beyond traditional trade in goods to include services, technology, and investment partnerships that create more balanced and sustainable economic relationships. This includes exploring opportunities for Maldivian investment in India, joint ventures in third countries, and collaborative approaches to accessing international development finance.

Economic cooperation should emphasize sustainability and climate resilience, given both countries' vulnerability to environmental challenges. This includes prioritizing renewable energy projects, sustainable tourism development, and climate-adapted infrastructure that serves long-term development goals rather than short-term economic gains.

12.3 People-to-People Engagement

Both countries should invest significantly in expanding people-to-people connections through educational exchanges, cultural programs, professional training opportunities, and tourism promotion. These connections create the social foundation necessary for sustained political and economic cooperation while also generating mutual understanding that helps navigate periodic challenges.

Educational cooperation should include expanded scholarship programs, institutional partnerships between universities and research institutions, and collaborative research projects that address shared challenges such as climate change, sustainable development, and regional security.

13. Conclusion

The analysis of India-Maldives relations reveals a relationship characterized by fundamental convergence of national interests despite periodic diplomatic challenges and the significant asymmetries in size and capabilities between the two countries. This convergence extends across multiple dimensions including economic development, security cooperation, cultural preservation, and environmental protection, creating a robust foundation for sustained partnership.

The recent diplomatic recalibration following tensions in early 2024 demonstrates the resilience of bilateral ties when grounded in shared strategic interests rather than merely personal or partisan political relationships. In July 2025, India and the Maldives revitalised ties with a USD 565 million line of credit from India to support Maldivian infrastructure projects, indicating both countries' commitment to maintaining and expanding their partnership despite temporary disagreements.

The economic dimension of the relationship has shown particularly impressive growth, with trade between the two nations growing substantially—from crossing the USD 300 million mark in 2021 to exceeding USD 500 million in 2022. This economic expansion reflects both countries' recognition that economic interdependence serves their respective development goals while also creating stakeholders in continued cooperation.

Security cooperation remains a crucial pillar of the relationship, with both countries recognizing that their geographic positions and strategic circumstances create natural alignment in addressing maritime security challenges, regional stability concerns, and transnational threats. The evolution of security cooperation toward capacity-building rather than dependency-creating arrangements reflects both countries' commitment to sovereignty and strategic autonomy.

Environmental cooperation represents an emerging dimension of bilateral relations with significant potential for expansion, given both countries' vulnerability to climate change and shared interest in sustainable development approaches. This cooperation serves immediate practical needs while also contributing to broader international efforts to address global environmental challenges.

The theoretical implications of this analysis extend beyond the specific case of India-Maldives relations to broader questions about how small states and large states can develop sustainable partnerships that serve mutual interests while respecting sovereignty and strategic autonomy. The success of this bilateral relationship suggests that geographic proximity, cultural affinity, and strategic patience can overcome significant asymmetries in capabilities when combined with genuine commitment to mutual benefit.

Future prospects for the relationship appear positive, with both countries demonstrating commitment to expanding cooperation across multiple dimensions while managing occasional disagreements through dialogue and compromise. The establishment of frameworks for free trade negotiations, expanded development cooperation, and enhanced security partnership suggests that both countries view their bilateral relationship as strategically important for their long-term development and security objectives.

The India-Maldives relationship ultimately demonstrates that successful bilateral partnerships in the contemporary international system require more than simple convergence of interests; they require sustained investment in institutional frameworks, people-to-people connections, and crisis management mechanisms that can maintain cooperation even during periods of political tension or leadership change. This relationship provides valuable insights for other bilateral partnerships facing similar challenges of asymmetry, external pressure, and domestic political variation.

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