



Maldivian Foreign Minister's India Visit: Little Impact on Bilateral Ties

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Summary

In an effort to mend ties with New Delhi, the Maldives' Foreign Minister Moosa Zameer arrived in New Delhi on 8 May 2024. However, given the frosty ties between the two countries since Mohamed Muizzu was elected to power in the Maldives, there is little room for optimism about improving their bilateral relations anytime soon.

Amid freezing ties, Moosa Zameer, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Maldives, arrived in New Delhi on 8 May 2024. He met with India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on 9 May before leaving for Malé in the morning on 10 May 2024.

This was the first high-level official visit from the Maldives to New Delhi since President Mohamed Muizzu came to office in late 2023. Labelled a 'pro-China' leader, soon after assuming office, Muizzu went to China in January 2024. During his visit, the Maldives and China signed an action plan to build a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership and a number of [bilateral cooperation documents](#) on the Belt and Road Initiative, disaster management, economy and technology, blue economy, digital economy, green development, infrastructure and people's livelihood

On Zameer's visit to New Delhi, a [pre-visit press release](#) issued by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs stated, "[The] Maldives is India's key maritime neighbour in the Indian Ocean Region and Foreign Minister Zameer's visit is expected to lend further momentum to the bilateral cooperation between the two countries." Likewise, a [press release](#) from the Maldivian foreign ministry said that the country's foreign minister will meet his Indian counterpart "...and hold discussions in deepening and expanding the longstanding partnership between the Maldives and India".

The visit was a day before the [10 May 2024 deadline](#) to withdraw Indian soldiers from the Maldives. The soldiers were to be withdrawn in two batches. There were 88 Indian soldiers stationed in the Maldives to operate two helicopters, a Dornier aircraft gifted by India and at the Senahiya military hospital.

Zameer's visit is viewed as an initiation by the Maldives government to mend ties with India which deteriorated following [derogatory remarks](#) made by three Maldivian deputy ministers against Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in January 2024. Although they were suspended, the damage was already done. Many Indians, including Bollywood celebrities, took to social media to support the boycott of the Maldives and promote [Indian tourism trend](#). Consequently, there was a decrease in the number of Indian tourists to the Maldives. India slipped from a leading tourist sender to the Maldives to sixth among the tourist-sending

countries to the island country. For instance, in March 2024, [only 28,751 Indian tourists](#) went to the Maldives, constituting 16.1 percent of tourists to the island state.

Despite a decline in their bilateral ties, on the request from the Maldives in April 2024, India [removed restrictions](#) and allowed the export of 124,218 metric tonnes of rice, 109,162 tonnes of wheat flour, 64,494 tonnes of sugar, 21,513 metric tonnes of potatoes, 35,749 tonnes of onions and 427.5 million eggs to Malé. Then, on 3 May 2024, the [Fourth Meeting of the High-Level Core Group](#) between India and the Maldives took place in New Delhi, where both sides reviewed their relationships and held discussions on issues of mutual interests, including development and defence cooperation.

During the meeting with Zameer, in a [“veiled reference”](#) to the Maldives’ tilt towards China, Jaishankar [stated](#):

“As close and proximate neighbours, the development of our ties is obviously based on mutual interests and reciprocal sensitivity. As far as India is concerned, these are articulated in terms of our Neighbourhood First policy and SAGAR [Security and Growth for All in the Region] vision...India has been a key provider of development assistance to the Maldives. Our projects have benefited the lives of people of your country; contributed directly to the quality of life. They range from infrastructure projects and social initiatives to medical evacuation and health facilities. We have also extended financial support on favourable terms in the past. India has been a First Responder on numerous occasions for [the] Maldives. Our cooperation has also enhanced the security and well-being of your country through shared activities, equipment provisioning, capacity building and training.”

India and the Maldives expressed commitment to [working together](#) on areas of mutual interest. Jaishankar and Zameer discussed development cooperation, tourism initiatives and human resource development. On the derogatory remarks against Modi, Mossa said that the country is taking [“proper action”](#) to prevent repeated incidents. He also expressed the hope that more Indians would visit the Maldives.

Zameer’s visit to New Delhi may be viewed as an initiative to improve ties. However, given the situation, it is hard to expect the relations between the two countries to improve anytime soon. New Delhi’s primary concern is the ‘pro-China’ tilt of the Muizzu administration. Unless New Delhi is assured and becomes confident that its interests are well secured in the Maldives, the chances of an improvement in their bilateral ties soon look slim.

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