

1. DESPITE RECENT DEVELOPMENTS, INDIA WILL STRIVE TO MAINTAIN A STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MALDIVES, GIVEN ITS CRUCIAL ROLE IN THE BROADER INDIAN OCEAN STRATEGY. DISCUSS. (ANSWER IN 150 WORDS)

Approach:

- Introduce with the context of recent developments in India-Maldives relations.
- Discuss why India will strive to maintain a strategic relationship with the Maldives.
- Conclude accordingly.

Answer:

Recently, the relations between India and Maldives hit a new low following a row over derogatory comments made by Maldives' deputy minister regarding the Indian Prime Minister's visit to Lakshadweep and Maldives' call for the withdrawal of Indian troops. Despite of this, India will strive to maintain a strategic relationship with the Maldives due to reasons given below:

- **Protecting maritime trade:** Maldives is situated along major maritime trade routes, such as the sea lanes that connect the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea to the Arabian Sea and the broader Indian Ocean. These routes are vital for the transportation of goods, including oil and natural gas, between the Middle East and India.
- **Countering China:** As China's influence in the Maldives grows, there may be concerns in India about the potential shift in the geopolitical balance in the region. If Maldives becomes more closely aligned with China, it could impact India's traditional sphere of influence in the Indian Ocean.
- **Protecting Indian diaspora in Maldives:** The Indian diaspora, estimated to be around 33,000 strong, acts as a bridge between the two nations. This creates a sense of goodwill and strengthens people-to-people ties, acting as a buffer during any political strains.
- **Ensuring maritime security:** Issues such as piracy, illegal fishing, and other transnational threats require collaboration among nations, and the strategic location of Maldives contributes to maintaining regional stability through its participation in security initiatives.
 - For example, **Maldives, India and Sri Lanka** cooperate to keep other countries from encroaching on their respective territory.
- **Securing Indian investment:** Considering the Indian investments in infrastructure projects, trade, etc., a stable and friendly relationship with the Maldives ensures its protection and promotes economic growth in the region.
 - For example, the **Greater Male connectivity projects** are funded by India in the form of \$100 million grant and \$400 million line of Credit.
- **Ensuring regional stability:** A stable and secure Maldives contributes to overall regional stability in the IOR, which aligns with India's "**Neighbourhood First**" policy.

India's ability to manage its strategic interests in the Indian Ocean region requires a combination of **diplomatic engagement, economic cooperation**, and understanding the **domestic political landscape in the Maldives**.