

INDIA ANNOUNCES \$500 MN PACKAGE FOR THE MALDIVES

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - Indian Ocean Island nations

Grand plans: A file photo of the Sinamale Bridge, formerly known as the China-Maldives Friendship Bridge. AFP-

India announced a slew of new connectivity measures for the Maldives, including air, sea, intra-island and telecommunications in an effort to help the Indian Ocean Islands deal with the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Among the initiatives announced at a meeting between External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Maldives Foreign Minister Abdullah Shahid via videoconference on Thursday are an air connectivity “bubble” for travel, a direct ferry service, a submarine cable for telecom connectivity; and assistance for the Greater Male Connectivity project (GMCP) to connect Male to three neighbouring islands, the biggest such project thus far.

“Responding to a request from the Government of Maldives, the External Affairs Minister announced India’s decision to support the implementation of the GMCP in Maldives, through a financial package consisting of a grant of USD 100 million and a new Line of Credit (LoC) of USD 400 million,” the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in a statement.

The GMCP would be the “largest civilian infrastructure project in Maldives”, it noted.

Connecting islands

The project, which will consist of a number of bridges and causeways to connect Male to Villingili, Thilafushi and Gulhifahu islands that span 6.7 km, will take much of the pressure off the main capital island of Male for commercial and residential purposes.

The \$400 million Line of Credit comes in addition to a previous LoC of \$800 million that was announced by New Delhi in December 2018.

“A landmark moment in Maldives-India cooperation today as we receive Indian assistance of USD250 million as budget support and USD500 million for the Greater Malé Connectivity Project,” said Mr. Solih in a tweet thanking Prime Minister Narendra Modi and India.

When completed, the project would render the Chinese-built Sinemale Friendship bridge connecting Male to two other islands, thus far the most visible infrastructure project in the islands, “insignificant in comparison”, the sources said.

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