

MALDIVES, CHINA SIGN 20 AGREEMENTS AFTER MUIZZU-XI MEETING AMID DIPLOMATIC ROW WITH INDIA

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

Chinese President [Xi Jinping](#) on Wednesday held talks with his Maldivian counterpart Mohamed Muizzu following which the two countries signed 20 key agreements, including one on tourism cooperation, and elevated their bilateral ties to a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership. The two heads of state announced the elevation of bilateral ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

"20 key agreements were signed today between the Government of the Maldives and the Government of [China](#) this afternoon and both the Presidents witnessed the signing ceremony," Maldivian President's office said in a post on X.

[Want a Loan? Get cash against your Mutual Funds in 4 hours](#)

The agreements signed included one tourism cooperation, disaster risk reduction, blue economy, strengthening investment in the digital economy and the Belt and Road Initiative. China will also provide grant assistance to the Maldives, but the amount was not disclosed.

Muizzu and his wife Sajida Mohammad were given a ceremonial red carpet welcome at the Great Hall of People. President Xi and his wife Peng Liyuan later hosted a state banquet in their honour.

Muizzu's state visit to China is taking place amid a diplomatic row with India over derogatory remarks by his ministers against Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) and the release of a report by EU Election Observation Mission of Maldives that said the ruling coalition of Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) and the People's National Congress (PNC) deployed anti-India sentiments and attempted to spread disinformation in the 2023 presidential elections in which Muizzu won.

Muizzu, who is regarded as a pro-China leader, is visiting China amid the row with India after some Maldivian ministers posted derogatory remarks against Prime Minister Modi leading to a spate of cancellations of reservations by Indian tourists, who constitute the largest number of visitors to the tourism-dependent island nation.

Besides talks with Xi, Muizzu is expected to meet Chinese [Premier](#) Li Qiang and other senior officials before his return to Male on January 12.

Muizzu reached Beijing last night after staying in the Chinese city of Fujian for two days.

In his address to the Maldives Business Forum in Fujian Province on Tuesday, Muizzu appealed to China to "intensify" efforts to send more tourists to his country.

"China was our (Maldives') number one market (for tourism) pre-Covid, and it is my request that we intensify efforts for China to regain this position," he said.

His appeal for more Chinese tourists came amid a diplomatic row with India.

Muizzu's government suspended three deputy ministers for their derogatory posts on social

media.

Also, the Maldives Association of Tourism Industry (MATI) strongly condemned the derogatory comments.

According to data released by the Maldives Tourism Ministry earlier, India has remained the largest tourist market for the country in 2023.

The highest number of visitors to the Maldives were from India, with 209,198 arrivals, followed by Russia in second place with 209,146 arrivals, and China in third place with 187,118 arrivals.

Muizzu also said that China remains "one of our closest allies and development partners."

He praised the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects launched by President Xi in 2014, saying that they "delivered the most significant infrastructure projects witnessed in Maldivian history", according to his speech.

He also said that his administration is committed to the quick implementation of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) signed with China, describing it as a symbol of the close commercial ties between the two countries.

Maldives and China signed the FTA in December 2014 during the pro-China President Abdulla Yameen administration. However, his successor President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih's administration did not implement the agreement, according to Maldives media reports.

He said the FTA is a symbol of the close commercial ties between the two countries.

"The FTA's aim to boost bilateral trade and investments, especially increasing our export of fish products to China is a key priority for us through the FTA," he said.

China-Maldives bilateral trade in 2022 totalled to USD 451.29 million of which China's exports constituted USD 451.29 million against USD 60,000 of exports from Maldives.

Muizzu also sought investments from Chinese companies for 11 projects at the Maldives Investment Forum.

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com