

# 'MALDIVES SHOULD NOT TRY BALANCING TIES WITH INDIA AND CHINA'

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

The Maldives should not try to balance relations with India and China, according to Mohamed Nasheed, Speaker and former President. "In my personal view, the Maldives shouldn't even try to do that. Those who think it is possible to balance ties with these two powers are being naïve," he told *The Hindu*, on the sidelines of a press conference in Colombo.

"This is not to say we should be hostile with China," Mr. Nasheed said. "We will be happy to maintain cultural ties with China. But we can't afford to have defence cooperation. Development or economic partnership too will be hard if China doesn't change its *modus operandi*." A vocal critic of China-backed development initiatives during the previous Yameen administration, Mr. Nasheed has in the past sought an audit of the ongoing projects in the Maldives.

His comments come a week after Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the island nation, on his first visit abroad after being re-elected to office. Describing Mr. Modi's recent visit "very productive and positive", Mr. Nasheed said it showed "that India really values the relationship".

## 'Solidarity visit'

Maldivian Vice-President Faisal Naseem, Mr. Nasheed, some Ministers and about 65 parliamentarians are on a "solidarity visit" to Sri Lanka, nearly two months after the Easter terror attacks. The leaders called on Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and Speaker Karu Jayasuriya among others.

In a "symbolic gesture", the contingent flew Sri Lankan airlines, the state carrier, and all members of the visiting team are staying at Hotel Cinnamon Grand, one of the three hotels that were bombed on April 21. Describing terror as the "single biggest issue" facing nation states, Mr. Nasheed sought collective action in the region in combating the threat.

Asked about the government's initiatives to tackle extremism, amid reports of dozens of Maldivians joining jihadist wars abroad, he said: "We know who they are, and where they are. The government and security forces have a good grip on the situation." Observing that a few in the Maldives were drawn to a radical version of Islam, he said: "President Solih has been able to engage with religious-minded people on this issue."

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