

# INDIA, MALDIVES TO TAKE DEFENCE TIES FORWARD

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

Narendra Modi meets Maldives President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih on the sidelines of the UN session in September. PTI-

With the recent improvement in relations, India and the Maldives will take forward several pending measures to promote defence cooperation in the next few months, diplomatic sources said.

These include lease of a Dornier aircraft, bringing the Maldives under India's coastal radar chain network and a broad-based humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) exercise.

"The agreement for lease of a Dornier aircraft for maritime surveillance is being finalised. It should be done in the next few months, at the latest by early next year," diplomatic sources told *The Hindu*, adding the Maldives was looking to transform its military in a big way, and the cooperation would be beneficial to the island nation.

New Delhi sent a Letter of Exchange for a two-year lease of the Dornier at the request of Male a few years ago. But the deal was not finalised by the Maldives owing to the friction in the relationship. In this context, sources pointed out that the two Advanced Light Helicopters (ALH) given by India were of "great service". They were flying round the clock for medical evacuation and search and rescue.

India gifted the Maldives two ALHs in 2013 and each was operated by the Indian Coast Guard and the Indian Navy. However, a controversy broke out last year after the previous Maldives government refused to extend the visas of Indian military personnel and asked India to take back the helicopters.

## Radar links

Work on the radar stations to plug the Maldives into India's coastal radar chain is progressing fast. "Two of the stations are functional and the third is in an advanced stage. It should be fully linked by January," the sources added.

In the aftermath of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks, India began setting up the coastal radar chain network to monitor the movement of traffic on the high seas. Mauritius, the Seychelles and Sri Lanka have already been part of the network.

At the Goa Maritime Conclave, hosted recently by the Navy for Indian Ocean littoral states, the major focus was on information-sharing. India offered to share real-time movement of maritime traffic. Of late, the Navy has stepped up cooperation with the countries in the region. Terrorism is a major threat to the Maldives, and maritime security is the top-most concern, diplomatic sources said.

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