

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ



Date: 13 July 2020
Male', Maldives

Speech Given by Speaker of Parliament, President Mohamed Nasheed during the Ceremony Held to Handover Outdoor Fitness Equipment

Full Translation

Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid, Indian High Commissioner to the Maldives Shri Sunjay Sudhir, Minister of Youth, Sports and Community Empowerment Mr. Mahloof, Chairman of the Sports Cooperation Mr. Ahmed Mauroof, Members of Parliament, and all gathered here today.

High Commissioner, I am sure you will excuse me, I have written my speech in Dhivehi today.

We heard recently that Bollywood legend Amitabh Bachchan has tested positive for Covid-19 and is undergoing treatment. I am sure, that there is no Maldivian citizen who doesn't wish him a speedy recovery. I too wish him the same.

We all know that the relationship between our two nations of India and Maldives spans back many generations. Both our people eat rice and curry, tandoori and biryani. We watch Kasauti, and movies starring Shatrughan Sinha, Dharmendra, Amitabh Bachchan and Rekha. Even our cultures have strong similarities. Since as far back as our countries have existed, our people have intermingled and created strong bonds lasting the test of time.

It may be true that the Governments of Maldives and of India haven't necessarily had the best relationship at all times; but even during those times when that relationship was strained, we didn't stop 'eating rice and curry' or stop watching Amitabh's films. We didn't stop reading Indian books or abandon the cultures and way of life we share with India.

Maldivian nationalism is steeped in Islamic values and independence – and what we must accept is that the best way to maintain Maldivian independence, freedom and sovereignty is to sustain a close bilateral partnership with India. We are a part of the great Indian Ocean, and even though we have always thought of ourselves as a collective of tiny tropical islands, we are a large country when we take into consideration the area we occupy in the Indian Ocean waters. We span a thousand miles from North to South, and six hundred miles from East to West of our country; an area bigger than the landmass of Saudi Arabia. You

cannot cross the Indian Ocean without travelling in Maldivian waters. Almost all shipments being carried from the East to the West of the world cross into Maldivian waters on their way to their destinations. As such, Maldivian citizens and leaders have always been aware of our role and our responsibilities as a crucial part of the Indian Ocean territory.

Most of us will have grown up reading and studying about the historical significance of the relationship between our two nations. Our two countries have also worked together, and India has always been a partner in our growth. Today Maldives enjoys a special position in the Indian Ocean, one acknowledged and accepted even at the world stage. Approximately twenty-five thousand Maldivians are always, at any given time, navigating the waves of this Indian Ocean, either fishing, or travelling from one island to the other. There is no one more spread out over or acclimated to the Indian Ocean. There is no other country whose countrymen have utilized the Ocean for their livelihoods as we have. Seychelles, Mauritius, Comoros, Reunion and even Sri Lanka became our allies and partners through the relationship we have with India.

Maldives bore witness to the rapid development and enrichment of India. Some of us would remember travelling to India in the 60s and 70s – by the time we entered the new millennium, the India we knew, and love had changed almost completely. We saw an India that had grown exponentially, be it economically, infrastructurally or in terms of social development. India's middle class is almost equal to the population of a European nation. India's middle-class population is about 52 million and England has about 60 million people. Our next-door neighbors are a huge market for Maldivian tourism.

We must not forget that the GDP of the Maldives is just 5 billion USD, comparatively, Trivandrum's GDP is 30 billion USD.

We know that Maldivians want to live a life of dignity, wherein they are provided opportunities to work, to earn and enjoy robust health and to be able to give their children a better life than they enjoy. The Maldivian people ask that we provide them economic and social growth and development. We must let go of our antiquated beliefs so that we may provide a better future for our children, and our children's children. We must be wise, and join hands with India, so that we may enjoy similar growth and development. It is my opinion, and my firm belief that we cannot grow or develop beyond what we are now, if we abandon our close relationship with India.

I am also certain that Maldivians and their elected leaders will be wise and make shrewd and sensible decisions regarding our foreign policy and our relationship with our closest allies and neighbors, the closest and dearest of whom is India. I am sure, that the government elected by Maldivians will choose to embrace India and work with them to join in their successes and developments.

I would like to thank the High Commissioner Shri Sunjay Sudhir, Minister of External Affairs Shri Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and the people of India. Today we have a far better relationship than we were able to understand during the last five years. I'm very confident that we will be able to maintain this very good relationship and build upon it, for the benefit of both our peoples.

The End

