

## **74<sup>th</sup> Republic Day Reception**

### **Welcome Remarks by High Commissioner**

**Your Excellency Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, President of the Republic of Maldives;**

**Speaker of the Majlis Excellency Mohamed Nasheed;**

**Chief Justice Hon'ble Ahmed Muthasim Adnan,**

**Foreign Minister Excellency Abdulla Shahid;**

**Distinguished Ministers; Dignitaries;**

**Members of the Diplomatic Corps;**

**Members of the Indian Community; and**

**Friends of India in Maldives,**

1. I extend a warm welcome to all of you to the reception in celebration of India's Republic Day 2023.
2. I extend warm greetings and felicitations to all Indian nationals living in the Maldives.
3. I also take this opportunity to convey our best wishes for the continued peace, progress and prosperity of the Maldives.
4. This year's celebration is special as it is to commemorate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of India's Independence which we have been celebrating all over the world as 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav'.
5. We are deeply grateful to His Excellency President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih for gracing this occasion. His presence as well the presence of all of you show the strength of bonds of friendship between India and Maldives.

6. Republic Day is the day when the Constitution of India came into effect on 26 January 1950. Our Constitution was the outcome of our freedom struggle, a national movement led by Mahatma Gandhi - which was as much about winning independence as about rediscovering our own ideals. Our Constitution has successfully guided us over the last 75 years to transform India from a poor and under-developed country into a confident nation marching on the world stage.

7. Today, India is the 5<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world. It is also among the fastest growing major economies. We have made significant achievements in traditional areas of agriculture and manufacturing as well as in cutting-edge technologies of space and IT.

8. We have now set the goal, as articulated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his Independence Day speech last year, to become a developed nation by 2047 when India would celebrate 100 years of Independence. We are determined to overcome all the challenges that we may face in achieving Gandhiji's ideal of Sarvodaya - the upliftment of all.

9. As India marches ahead on the path of growth and development, we also remain conscious of our responsibilities to the larger world. As our External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar stated during his recent visit to Maldives, it is our belief that India's own development is inseparable from the rest of the world. This was the belief that guided our actions during the Covid pandemic and this is the belief that will guide our Presidency of G-20.

10. Friends, when it comes to the foreign policy, for India, neighbourhood is a priority and, as our Prime Minister said - in the neighbourhood, Maldives is priority. India and Maldives share a very special relationship which is time tested and built on the strong foundation of vibrant people-to-people ties.

11. Under the leadership of President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, our bilateral relations have both expanded and deepened for mutual benefit as well as for the benefit of the entire region.

12. Our two countries have worked closely to address the challenges emanating from the COVID pandemic and, subsequently, from the complex international environment.

13. Our development partnership has expanded tremendously. We are collaborating on large infrastructure projects as well as smaller high impact community development projects.

14. We have also significantly scaled-up our capacity building programmes. More than 4000 Maldivian friends have participated in various capacity building programmes in last 4 years.

15. Our economic partnership has acquired greater heft with a significant increase in bilateral trade and investments. The visa-free agreement has strengthened people-to-people ties. India has been the largest tourism market for Maldives for three years in a row.

16. We are working closely to maintain peace and security in our region. We also cooperate closely in various international fora.

17. Regular high-level engagements continue. President Solih paid a successful official visit to India in August 2022. Our External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar visited the northern areas of Maldives earlier this month during which several key projects were launched and inaugurated.

18. Friends, the India-Maldives partnership is ultimately driven by the peoples of both countries. It is indeed satisfying to see that our partnership is bringing tangible benefits to our peoples.

19. Going forward, we will focus on the following five areas:

- (i). Timely implementation of our development cooperation projects and initiatives;
- (ii). Strengthening economic cooperation through enhanced connectivity and greater investments;
- (iii). Closer collaboration to address our shared security challenges;
- (iv). Reinforcing people-to-people ties through capacity building programmes and cultural exchanges; and
- (v). Continuing our close cooperation on regional and international issues.

20. I am confident that the bonds of friendship between our two countries will continue to strengthen in the years ahead.

21. I would like to once again thank His Excellency President Solih and all the dignitaries and friends for joining us today.

22. I would also like to thank FM Abdulla Shahid and his team for the close partnership in taking this special relationship forward.

23. Apart from the formal programme, we have arranged a cultural programme - including performance by famous Maldivian band - Shalabee & group - and Indian cuisine for dinner. I wish you all a very enjoyable evening! Thank you.

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