

**Remarks by High Commissioner Shri Munu Mahawar
at the
India's 75th Republic Day Reception**

**28 January 2024
Jen Hotel, Male'**

Chief Guest Your Excellency Sheryna Abdul Samad, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs,

Chief Justice Hon'ble Ahmed Muthasim Adnan;

Distinguished Ministers; Dignitaries;

Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Members of the Indian Community; and

Friends of India in Maldives.

I extend a warm welcome to all of you to this joyous and momentous occasion to celebrate the 75th Republic Day of India.

I extend warm greetings and felicitations to all Indian nationals living in the Maldives.

I also take this opportunity to convey our best wishes for the continued peace, progress and prosperity of the Maldives.

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 in transforming India from an under-developed country into a confident nation marching on the world stage.

India today exemplifies the forces of democracy, demography and diversity. As we embark on a new year, let us take a moment to reflect on India's journey in the year gone by.

2023 saw the maturing or culmination of many landmark initiatives over the past decade that have put India well on its path to becoming a developed country over the next two decades.

The synthesis of extraordinary digital inclusion with widespread access to social benefits has been a remarkable feature of our goal of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas' (Development for all). The pace and scale of developments, particularly in the fields of health, education and infrastructure, have also been unprecedented.

Today, India is the 5th largest economy in the world. It is also the fastest growing major economy and has one of the best ecosystems in the world for nurturing of Start-ups.

We have made significant achievements in traditional areas of agriculture and manufacturing as well as in cutting-edge technologies of space and IT. Last year, we successfully reached the Moon and explored the Sun! We now aspire to have a manned space programme.

With an aim to enhance better connectivity and better amenities, we have created engineering marvels. The recently inaugurated India's longest Mumbai trans-harbour sea bridge "Atal Setu" is a shining example.

On the global stage, India's leadership of the G20 last year gave us an exceptional responsibility to coordinate global response to complex challenges and give voice to the aspirations of the Global South. The New Delhi Leaders' Declaration is a testimony to our firm commitment for inclusive development, as clearly reflected in the decision to include the African Union as a permanent member of the Group of 20.

Friends,

India and Maldives have a very special relationship. We have always stood by each-other in the hours of need. The defining feature of this special relationship is the goodwill and affection that our peoples have for each-other. From our perspective, to put it succinctly in the words of Prime Minister Narendra Modi – for India, neighbourhood is a priority and, in the neighbourhood, Maldives is priority.

Development cooperation has emerged as a key pillar of our multifaceted partnership. India's development assistance is enabling the Government of Maldives in building infrastructure, broadening the economic base, and spreading the fruits of development throughout the country.

Our bilateral trade and investments have witnessed impressive growth with facilitation measures such as visa-free travel, cargo service between our southern ports and Maldives, and the overall buoyancy in our development partnership.

When it comes to people-to-people ties, we have done exceptionally well in recent years. Since 2020, India has annually contributed the maximum number of tourists to the Maldives. Likewise, India has been, by far, the most favourite destination for our Maldivian friends.

One major achievement in our partnership is our engagement in the area of capacity building and human resource development. In recent years, we have significantly scaled up our cooperation by launching new programmes in diverse areas. In last five years, over 5000 Maldivian friends have participated in in-person training programmes in India. We hope to build on these successes and elevate this cooperation to greater heights.

As neighbours, we face common challenges and have a shared interest in maintaining peace and security in our region. Our defence and security cooperation is aimed at working together to confront these common challenges and promoting peace and prosperity in the region. The focus of our engagements is on capacity building and capability enhancement of Maldives' security forces. In this, we are guided by Prime Minister Modi's twin policies of 'Neighbourhood First' and SAGAR – Security and Growth for All in the Region.

Friends,

The India-Maldives partnership is ultimately driven by the peoples of both countries. It is indeed satisfying to see that our partnership has brought tangible benefits to our peoples.

We look forward to working closely with the Government of H.E. President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu to further strengthen the bonds of friendship between our two countries.

I would like to thank Her Excellency Sheryna Abdul Samad for gracing the occasion as the Chief Guest. I also sincerely thank all the eminent dignitaries and dear friends for joining us today in our celebrations.

Apart from the formal programme, we have also arranged a cultural programme – Hindi and Dhivehi songs dedicated to the India-Maldives friendship - and Indian cuisine for dinner. I wish you all a very enjoyable evening!

Thank you.
