

**Speech by The President Of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee at The Banquet in Honour Of The President Of The Republic Of Maldives, H.E. Mr. Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom**

Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi : 02.01.2014

Your Excellency, President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom,

President of the Republic of Maldives,

Madame Fathimath Ibrahim,

Shri Mohammad Hamid Ansari, Vice President of India,

Dr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India,

Distinguished Guests from the Republic of Maldives and

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is, indeed, a great pleasure to welcome Your Excellency and your delegation this evening. I am particularly delighted to meet you and personally congratulate you on your recent election. In coming to India on your first State Visit abroad as President of the Maldives, you have underscored an important sentiment - of according priority to our bilateral relationship - which is fully reciprocated.

Your Excellency, the close ties between India and Maldives are steeped in tradition. They are based on the cultural, linguistic and commercial relations that have bound our societies over the centuries. The Indian Ocean that connects us has nurtured the close people to people ties and wide-ranging cooperation that we have today for the mutual benefit of our respective peoples. Our special and privileged relations have been consolidated by regular high-level exchanges. Your visit and your engagements with our Government today have, no doubt, further reinforced our long-standing friendship and understanding. I am confident that both sides have been able to take this opportunity to thoroughly review our ongoing work and renew our commitment to achieving our common goals in the years to come.

Your Excellency, the Republic of Maldives has, since its independence in 1965, taken impressive strides in nation building. The recent Presidential elections and the smooth transition of power in Maldives is a testimony to the strengthening of democracy in your country. India appreciates the efforts of the political leadership in the Maldives in ensuring a free and fair electoral process and a constructive outcome. We compliment your endeavours and your determination to take Maldives towards progress and prosperity. Today, Maldives has earned the respect of the world

for its achievements in the socio-economic sphere and for its leadership on issues such as climate change and protection of the environment.

Among the areas of the close cooperation between India and Maldives is our excellent bilateral defence and security relationship. India, like Maldives, would like to see uninterrupted peace and security prevail in the Indian Ocean region . We both have had to address the challenges of piracy, smuggling, extremism and religious fundamentalism. India remains fully cognizant of the needs of Maldives in dealing with these issues and we are committed to assist in achieving the defence and security objectives of the Government of Maldives.

India wishes to work with Maldives and other like-minded nations to ensure peace in the Indian Ocean region. We are natural partners in this enterprise. At a regional level, we can do much more to enhance cooperation among the States to achieve better maritime domain awareness and increase coordination and surveillance by them. We have always been happy to extend our support and assistance, as and when required, to Maldives and we shall be happy to do so in the years to come.

Your Excellency, India would like to see Maldives continue to be stable, peaceful and prosperous, fulfilling the aspirations of its citizens. We have noted, with satisfaction, the positive outcome of grants that we have extended and resources that we have shared for development projects in the Maldives, capacity building, education and training and the humanitarian assistance that we have been able to provide in times of unforeseen emergencies. We look forward to our joint implementation of the initiatives announced today for the progress of the people of Maldives and the accomplishment of their developmental goals.

Your Excellency, I am confident that under your leadership, Maldives will see an era of growth and advancement in all sectors.

With these words, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, I invite you to join me in proposing a toast:

- to the health and success of His Excellency, President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom;
- to peace, stability, progress and prosperity of the people of Maldives; and
- to the enduring friendship between India and Maldives.