

## Solih Visits Singapore to Boost Bilateral Ties

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### Summary

*The visit of the President of the Maldives, Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, to Singapore on 1 July 2019 was aimed at enhancing bilateral cooperation. An Open Skies Agreement, signed between the two countries, will help the Maldivian tourism sector and facilitate people-to-people links. Singapore also agreed to train more Maldivians in areas such as sustainable development and governance.*

On the invitation of Singapore's President Halimah Yacob, the President of the Maldives, Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, made a state visit to Singapore on 1 July 2019. He also met with Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong during the visit. The two leaders discussed ways to enhance bilateral and economic [cooperation](#).

Singapore and the Maldives established diplomatic ties in [1975](#). In 1984, Singapore Airlines was one of the first to start direct flights to and from Male. The regular flight service has helped Singaporean companies such as [Banyan Tree](#) and [Hotel Properties](#) establish themselves in the Maldives. The flight service also supports a number of Singaporean tourists who visit Maldives [every year](#). At present, Singapore Airlines operates around 20 weekly flights to [Male](#). To boost further connectivity between Singapore and the Maldives, on 1 July 2019, the two countries signed an Open Skies Agreement which will enhance air connectivity between them and facilitate greater commercial, tourism and people-to-people [linkages](#).

After signing the air pact with the Maldives, Singapore's Senior Minister of State for Transport, Lam Pin Min, said that the agreement "underscores the strong bilateral ties between Singapore and Maldives, and will enable greater movement of people and goods between the two countries to benefit both our [economies](#)".

In his short speech at the banquet hosted by President Halimah, Solih said, "Our two countries share many common challenges, and we work together on a range of issues. From trade and commerce, security cooperation for the sustained peace and prosperity of the Indian ocean region, to combating terrorism, to fighting climate change and championing the cause of small [islands](#)". Praising Singapore's achievements, Solih said that, "[h]aving emerged from the wreckage of the Second World War, the Singapore of today is a high-tech metropolis and an economic powerhouse that sets the standard for the rest of the world in successful [governance](#)". On his country's relationship with Singapore, Solih said, "Singapore is one of the largest trading partners and our gateway to the rest of the world, making Singapore a dear friend and an important ally to [the Maldives](#)".

To help sustainable development in the Maldives, Singapore has agreed to provide "a two-year technical cooperation package, through the Singapore Cooperation Programme [SCP],

for senior Maldivian officials in the areas of sustainable [development and governance](#)". It is estimated that till date about 1,300 Maldivian officials have participated in the SCP, which provides courses and training for officials from many other [countries](#). In the past, Singapore has also hosted Maldivians for studies in such areas as education, finance, law and port [management](#). To further encourage such engagements, Singapore and the Maldives signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation between their respective foreign ministries to strengthen bilateral exchanges.

Economically, there are many sectors in the Maldives which may attract Singaporean business interest. Tourism is the primary sector which contributes around 28 per cent to the country's gross domestic product and earns about 60 per cent of the country's foreign exchanges. During Abdulla Yameen's tenure (2013-2018) as the President of the Maldives, a number of projects were taken up by Chinese companies to improve infrastructure in the tourism sector. However, after his election defeat to Solih in 2018, the relationship between the Maldives and China has become less friendly. Consequently, work on a number of such projects has stalled.

In recent years, one of the fastest growing sectors in the Maldives is construction. According to the Maldives Monetary Authority's quarterly economic review of October 2018, the construction sector had an annual growth of [51 per cent](#). There will be further boom in this sector because the growing population of the country will need more affordable housing.

Solih also visited the Pulau Semakau Landfill to know more about Singapore's experience in waste management. The Maldives is concerned about waste management. The Greater Malé capital region suffers from severe environmental pollution because of inadequate collection and haphazard disposal of [solid waste](#). Most of the garbage of the capital region is dumped and burnt at the 30-year-old, 10-hectare dumpsite on Thilafushi Island (six kilometres from Malé), creating a significant environmental and public [health hazard](#). The Greater Malé and its 32 inhabited outer islands "lack an organized and sustainable waste management system for the 774 tons per day (tpd) of mixed solid waste they [generate](#)". According to the Asian Development Bank's estimate, this waste in the Maldives is expected to increase by 19 per cent and reach 924 tpd by [2022](#) which will put further pressure on an already stressed waste management system.

In Singapore, Solih also met members of the Maldivian community living in the country. During his interactions with them, he said, "We will safeguard the independence and sovereignty of the nation in establishing deeper ties with [foreign countries](#)."

A close relationship with Singapore will help the Maldives learn to tackle some of its challenges such as waste management. It will also help the country earn foreign exchanges by attracting Singaporean tourists and investments to the Maldives.

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