

# Ukhandhu



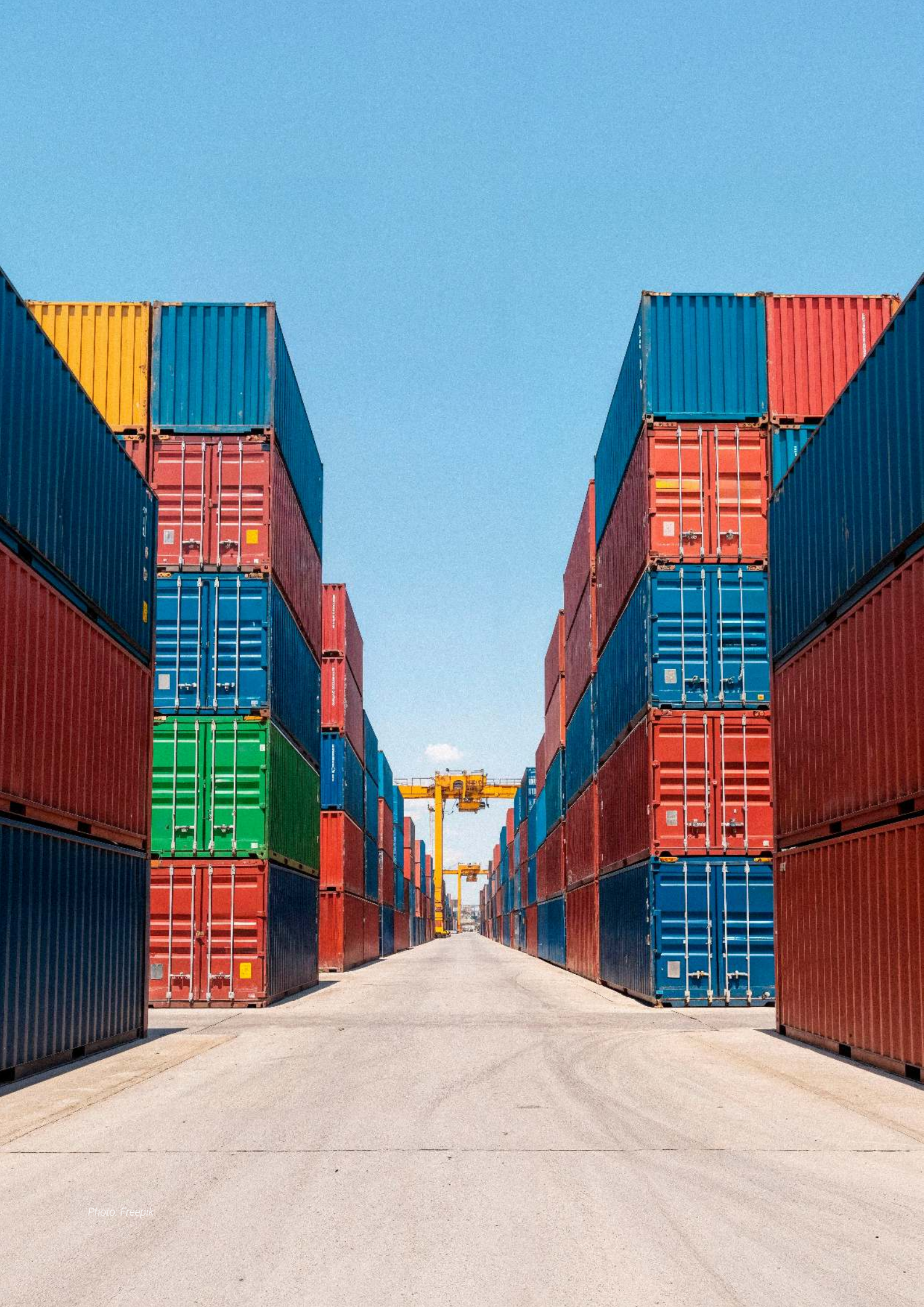
## Navigators of Change

Meet the visionaries charting the Maldives' maritime course.

## Anchoring Maldives' Growth

Maritime gateway to drive trade, investment, and economic resilience.







# CEO'S MESSAGE

**DCP (Retd) Mohamed Rishwan**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

It is with immense pleasure that I extend my warmest greetings to all of you on the occasion of the inaugural edition of Ulhandhu, the corporate magazine of Maldives Ports Limited (MPL). This milestone is particularly significant as it coincides with the celebration of our 39th anniversary, marking a moment of both reflection and forward-looking optimism.

The launch of Ulhandhu signifies a new chapter for MPL. This platform has been envisioned as a space to document our progress, provide insights into our operations, and establish a publication that will be recognized as a valuable resource within the maritime and shipping industry. Through this magazine, we aim to foster stronger connections with our stakeholders, employees, and partners, while sharing our journey and vision with a broader audience.

This inaugural edition is the result of the dedication and hard work of many individuals, particularly our Marketing and PR Department. I would also like to extend my gratitude to our esteemed contributors who have enriched this publication with their expertise. Special thanks to the Centre for Maritime Studies, MNDF Coast Guard, Maldives State Shipping (MSS), Maldives Customs Service and Maldives Police Service for their valuable insights.

Since its establishment in 1986, Malé Commercial Harbor has been the cornerstone of the Maldivian economy. As a nation heavily reliant on imports, the port has played a pivotal role in sustaining economic growth and ensuring the smooth flow of goods and services.

Looking ahead, the future of our ports is anchored in the Thilafushi Port Development Project, with the first phase already underway. Our vision is to create a modern, efficient, and resilient port infrastructure that not only meets the demands of today but also anticipates the needs of tomorrow.

As we celebrate 39 years of service, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to our employees, past and present, whose unwavering commitment and dedication have been the foundation of our success. I also extend my heartfelt thanks to our stakeholders and partners who have stood by us on this remarkable journey.

Here's to many more years of progress, innovation, and collaboration.

---



# CONTENTS

<b>6</b>	<b>Charting the Course: Faces Shaping the Maldives Maritime Industry</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>MPL: Powering the Lifeline of an Island Nation</b>
<b>20</b>	<b>Maldives Global Gateway: Trade &amp; Logistics</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>Thilafushi Port: The Maldives' Next Maritime Gateway</b>
<b>29</b>	<b>Anchoring Maldives' Growth</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>Port Operations &amp; Technology: A Small- Island Perspective</b>
<b>36</b>	<b>Modernizing Sea Trade – The New Era</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>Careers in Maritime Industry</b>
<b>43</b>	<b>Maritime Security and Emergency Services in the Maldives</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>Safeguarding Our Seas: The Lifeline of the Maldives</b>
<b>49</b>	<b>Navigating the Storm: Life &amp; Safety at Our Ports</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>Fisheries of the Maldives: A Saga of Sea and Survival</b>
<b>55</b>	<b>Addu First: A Practical, High-Return Strategy for National Logistics</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>From Paradise to Port: Expanding the Maldivian Brand Through Cruise Tourism</b>
<b>62</b>	<b>Growth, efficiency and development: 39 years of Malé Commercial Harbor</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>Connecting Sea and Sky: Maldives' Journey to a Multimodal Logistics Hub</b>



# Charting the Course: Faces Shaping the Maldives Maritime Industry



Maisa Ibrahim Naeem  
Manager, Marketing and PR  
Maldives Ports Limited

For the Maldives, the ocean has never been a distant frontier; it has always been home. A chain of islands scattered like pearls across the Indian Ocean, the country owes its survival and prosperity to the sea. From the earliest days when fishermen crafted dhonis from coconut timber to the modern era of container ships and digital logistics, the Maldives has relied on maritime connections to unite its people, supply its markets, and sustain its economy.

The story of maritime Maldives is centuries old. Maldivian sailors once navigated South Asian trade routes, exchanging fish, cowries, and coir rope for rice, textiles, and spices. In the 1970s, the establishment of Maldives National Shipping Limited (MNSL) marked a turning point. For the first time, the nation flew its own flag on the world's oceans, with ships calling at ports from Singapore to Rotterdam. Malé Harbour bustled with activity, and for a generation of Maldivians, shipping became a proud symbol of independence and

ambition. Yet the eventual decline of MNSL and the dominance of foreign carriers left the nation dependent on others to carry its lifeblood of imports.

Today that vulnerability is starker than ever. More than 90 percent of goods consumed in the Maldives arrive by sea. Every container — whether filled with food, fuel, medicine, or construction material — represents not just commerce, but survival. The congestion of Malé Commercial Harbour, the fragility of global supply chains exposed during the Covid19-pandemic, and rising freight costs have underscored the urgent need to modernize. For a small island nation spread across 1,192 islands, efficient ports and shipping are not luxuries; they are existential necessities.

Yet the Maldives also holds unique advantages. Its location at the heart of the Indian Ocean places it along some of the busiest east–west shipping routes linking Asia, Africa, and Europe. The same waters once traversed by fishermen now carry the arteries of global commerce. For shipping giants, these routes are lifelines; for the Maldives, they are opportunities – to build logistics hubs, expand transshipment services, and position the nation as more than a tourist destination, but also a player in international trade.

But what does it take for a small island nation to stand tall among maritime giants? Infrastructure alone cannot provide the answer. Cranes and warehouses may move cargo, but it is leadership, vision, and resilience that truly shape a maritime nation.

This is where people matter. The story of maritime Maldives today is not told through steel and concrete, but through individuals who look beyond daily operations toward national transformation. They are not all sailors; some come from governance, others from education or defense. Yet together they represent the lifeblood of an industry that keeps the nation alive.

This feature highlights five such leaders:

- **DCP (Retd.) Mohamed Rishwan**, Chief Executive Officer of Maldives Ports Limited, who is relocating the nation’s main port to Thilafushi and reframing ports as a collective mission.
- **Brigadier General Mohamed Saleem**, Commandant of the Maldives National Defence Force - Coast Guard, who is modernizing maritime defense and strengthening regional cooperation.
- **Ahmed Shareef**, Chief Executive Officer of Maldives State Shipping, who has revived national shipping with bold strategies and modern logistics.
- **Capt. Mohamed Zaid**, Head of the Centre for Maritime Studies, Maldives National University, who is transforming education to prepare the next generation of seafarers.
- **Capt. Abdul Latheef Mohamed**, Minister of State for Transport and Civil Aviation, whose five-decade career spans commanding ships and shaping international maritime policy.

Together, their journeys reveal not only individual success stories but also a broader national narrative – a country seeking to balance vulnerability with resilience and dependence with sovereignty. Geography may place the Maldives at the mercy of global tides, but leadership ensures the nation sails with purpose.





## DCP (RETD.) MOHAMED RISHWAN Driving Ports Towards a National Mission

When DCP (Retd.) Mohamed Rishwan became Chief Executive Officer of Maldives Ports Limited (MPL), many were struck by the different path that brought him there. Unlike traditional maritime leaders, he did not begin as a cadet or ship officer. Instead, his formative years unfolded in uniform, first in the National Security Services and later in the Maldives Police Service, where he learned discipline, crisis management, and system-building.

That background matters. For a nation where ports are lifelines, resilience is not only about infrastructure but also about leadership that can prepare for crises and respond decisively. DCP (Retd.) Mohamed Rishwan's decades in security and governance shaped him into a leader who understands both fragility and the need to build unbreakable systems.

### Foundations of Leadership

His career began in the National Security Services (–1995 2004), rising as instructor, commander, and regional base leader. He trained hundreds of officers, led international exercises with U.S. and Royal Marines, and commanded operations during national crises. In 2004, he helped design the Maldives Police Service and, as Deputy Commissioner, oversaw elections, riot control, and community policing. Later, he managed Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital, helped implement the Dharumavantha Hospital project, and led ventures in diagnostics and hospitality, experiences that sharpened his eye for reform and efficiency.

### The Thilafushi Port Relocation

At the core of his vision is relocating Malé Commercial Harbour (MCH) to Thilafushi, one of the nation's most ambitious infrastructure projects. Built for a smaller population, MCH had become a choke point, with week-long clearing times, delays for shipping lines, and higher costs for consumers.

Thilafushi offers a reset: cargo clearance will drop to 48 hours, automation will streamline logistics, and expanded space will allow faster, safer handling. Shipping costs will fall, making the Maldives more competitive. The ripple effects are clear – stabilised prices, stronger investment appeal, and the potential to shift the Maldives from bottleneck to gateway.

### Regional Port Development

DCP (Retd.) Mohamed Rishwan also sees decentralization as key. By creating bonded warehouses, duty-free zones, and regional economic free zones, MPL is transforming underused facilities into logistics hubs. For islands, this means jobs and growth; for the nation, diversified trade flows and reduced reliance on Malé.



## Diversifying MPL's Role

His vision extends beyond ports. MPL is being reshaped into a logistics and training powerhouse. Partnerships with Maldives National University established a Learning and Development Academy, while new dockyard services provide local repair and maintenance options. MPL's logistics footprint has expanded to port-to-port services, atoll-level cargo movements, SOE logistics, and the Addu Fish Hub, which integrates fisheries with global supply chains.

## A Philosophy of National Mission

DCP (Retd.) Mohamed Rishwan frames MPL's transformation around six principles: make port development a collective national effort; cultivate new leaders; pursue constant renewal; build a workforce that rises "from good

to great"; anchor progress in political commitment; and compete regionally with global best practices. His motto – *"Can-do Spirit. Bold Changes. Greatness Ahead"* – reflects a belief that infrastructure alone is not enough; leadership and culture are just as vital.

## Closing Reflection

From training cadets in Girifushi to steering national hospitals and now the country's ports, DCP (Retd.) Mohamed Rishwan's journey mirrors the transformation he seeks for MPL. For him, ports are not just docks and cranes – they are arteries of sovereignty and resilience, carrying the weight of national ambition into the future.



## BRIGADIER GENERAL MOHAMED SALEEM Securing the Maritime Domain

As the 12th Commandant of the Maldives National Defence Force Coast Guard, Brigadier General Mohamed Saleem stands at the frontline of the nation's maritime security. Appointed in December 2023, he serves as principal maritime advisor to the Chief of Defence Force, overseeing training, operational readiness, and deployment of mission-capable assets for defense, safety, law enforcement, and humanitarian operations. With nearly three decades of service, he bridges seafaring command with strategic leadership ashore, making him a pivotal figure in shaping the Maldives' maritime resilience.

## From Deck to Command

Brigadier General Mohamed Saleem's early career began at the Indian Naval Academy, later complemented by advanced training in Malaysia, China, the United States, and India. At sea, he commanded the Coast Guard vessels Huravee and Shaheedh Ali. Ashore, he held senior leadership roles as Deputy Commander of the Southern Area, Area Commander of the Northern Area, Coast Guard Director, and Principal Director. From 2019 to 2021, he also served as the 10th Commandant of the Coast Guard, before returning to the post in 2023. These experiences forged a leader equally comfortable on the bridge of a ship and in the strategy room.

## Modernizing the Force

Under his command, the Coast Guard has entered a phase of modernization. He oversaw the integration of Fast Interceptor Crafts and improved crew training, enhancing the country's coastal response capabilities. He also introduced the force's first Tactical Operating Procedure, streamlined training, and aligned vessels with naval customs, strengthening the institution's professional identity. His six strategic priorities form the backbone of development: empowering the force, investing in human capital, legal empowerment, building a comprehensive maritime domain awareness system, inducting new mission-capable assets, and upgrading logistics and engineering. Together, these priorities ensure the Coast Guard can respond effectively to evolving threats.

## Regional Voice, National Protector

Brigadier General Mohamed Saleem has also elevated the Maldives' role on the international stage. By expanding partnerships and fostering interoperability with regional and global counterparts, he has strengthened the Coast Guard's credibility as a contributor to collective security in the Indian Ocean. His decorated service record — including the SAARC Medal, Distinguished Service Medal, Republic Medal, and Ribbon for Bravery — reflects both operational excellence and calm leadership in high-pressure situations such as search-and-rescue missions and maritime emergencies.

### A Leader's Creed

*"Maritime security is not just a national obligation; it is a regional responsibility,"* he often says.

To the next generation, his message is equally clear:

*"The ocean may be vast and uncertain, but with resolve, discipline, and integrity, there is no tide that cannot be navigated."*

His philosophy places maritime security at the heart of sovereignty, ensuring it underpins economic stability, trade, and national safety.

## Closing Reflection

Brigadier General Mohamed Saleem's journey reflects the balance between discipline at sea and strategy ashore. From commanding vessels to modernizing the Coast Guard, his leadership ensures the Maldives' maritime domain remains secure, resilient, and regionally engaged. For him, maritime security is more than guarding borders — it is about safeguarding sovereignty, enabling trade, and protecting lives. His legacy will be a Coast Guard stronger in capacity and broader in vision, standing as both protector of the nation and contributor to stability across the Indian Ocean.



## AHMED SHAREEF

### Reviving the Spirit of Maldivian Shipping

Ahmed Shareef grew up in Malé during the glory days of Maldivian shipping. In the 1970s and 1980s, vessels of Maldives National Shipping Limited (MNSL) proudly flew the nation's flag on global sea routes. For Maldivians, seeing their ships dock at foreign ports symbolized independence and ambition. Shareef dreamed of becoming a captain and even began cadetship at sea, but unforeseen circumstances forced him to change course. Decades later, fate brought him back — not on the bridge of a ship, but in the boardroom of Maldives State Shipping (MSS). As Managing Director and CEO, he now carries the responsibility of reviving national shipping and restoring pride to a sector that once defined sovereignty.

## Governance and Leadership Roots

Before joining MSS, Shareef built over two decades of experience in governance. He served as an island chief (Katheeb), Atoll Council Director General, and later Secretary General of Malé City Council, while earning an MBA in Strategic Management. His leadership was recognized nationally when Kolhumadulu Atoll Council topped the Local Government Performance Index (2017) and won the Civil

Service Excellence Award. One of his biggest tests came during the Covid19- pandemic. As Secretary General, he managed lockdowns and relief for the Greater Malé Region, home to nearly half the population. The crisis demanded resilience, clarity, and quick decision-making — skills he later drew upon when leading MSS through volatile global shipping conditions.

## Transforming MSS

When Shareef took charge, the challenge was immense. MNSL had collapsed years earlier, leaving the Maldives dependent on foreign carriers for imports. With over 90% of goods arriving by sea, this dependency posed serious risks.

Under his leadership, MSS quickly gained ground. By the end of 2024, it secured 60% of the Colombo–Maldives market share, becoming the country’s second-largest sea importer. For Ahmed Shareef, this was not just a business milestone but a statement of resilience.

He spearheaded bold initiatives:

- **Sea-to-Air Initiative** – Partnered with airlines to combine maritime freight with regional air hubs, positioning the Maldives as a logistics connector.
- **Feeder Service Expansion** – Extended services to Malaysia and Indonesia, reducing reliance on Colombo.
- **Fisheries Logistics** – Introduced reefer containers and integrated logistics for MIFCO exports, aligning with the government’s pledge to pay fishermen within 48 hours.
- **Digital Transformation** – Launched real-time tracking systems for greater efficiency.
- **Fleet Growth** – Expanded the container fleet, steadily boosting MSS’s NVOCC capacity.

These reforms revitalized national shipping and re-established it as a strategic pillar of sovereignty.

## Sovereignty and Youth Empowerment

For Ahmed Shareef, MSS is more than commerce; it is a safeguard of independence. Without a national shipping line, the Maldives is vulnerable to foreign pricing, delays, and disruptions. A strong MSS means greater control over trade and an additional source of foreign currency earnings outside tourism and fishing.

Equally important is youth empowerment. Ahmed Shareef launched the Kalaaseen Scholarship Program with Akademi Laut Malaysia (ALAM), enabling Maldivian cadets to complete STCW training abroad. He continues to build international partnerships to create pathways for young professionals. His message is clear: the maritime industry is a “blue ocean of opportunities”, a gateway to global trade, high wages, and service to the nation.

## Closing Reflection

Ahmed Shareef’s story is one of revival, not only of an organization, but of national pride. Drawing on lessons from governance and the collapse of MNSL, he has rebuilt MSS with resilience and vision. His leadership through global disruption underscores his ability to navigate turbulence with steady resolve.

By modernizing MSS, expanding its footprint, and investing in youth, Ahmed Shareef has repositioned Maldivian shipping not as a memory of the past but as a cornerstone of the future. For a nation defined by the sea, this revival is both timely and essential.



Photo: Maldives Ports Limited



## CAPT. MOHAMED ZAID

### From the Bridge to the Classroom

Capt. Mohamed Zaid, Head of the Centre for Maritime Studies (CMS) at the Maldives National University, bridges two worlds: the unforgiving realities of life at sea and the structured discipline of academia. With more than 35 years of experience, he has commanded vessels worldwide and now commands classrooms that prepare future seafarers. His journey demonstrates how knowledge transfer from bridge to lecture hall, which secures the nation's maritime resilience.

### Navigating His Path

Capt. Mohamed Zaid began his career in 1991 as a deck cadet with Maldives National Shipping Ltd (MNSL), following earlier generations who carried the Maldivian flag abroad. Determined to progress, he studied at the Lal Bahadur Shastri College of Advanced Maritime Studies in Mumbai, gaining his first Certificate of Competency in 1998. His seafaring career spanned general cargo ships, multipurpose vessels, and bulk carriers with Oldendorff, a German ship management company. Sailing under different flags exposed him to diverse operating cultures and technologies. "Switching from Maldivian to foreign ships was a challenge," he reflects, "but it gave me the exposure needed to lead effectively at both junior and senior levels." He later attended the Australian Maritime College, earning the Chief Mate Unlimited Certificate in 2009 and the Master Unlimited Certificate in 2017 under the Australian Maritime Safety Authority. These qualifications allowed him to command globally traded vessels, sailing as both Chief Mate and Master until 2019.

### Life at Sea: Lessons in Leadership

Years at sea taught Capt. Mohamed Zaid lessons no classroom could replicate. Long months away from family, unpredictable weather, and managing multinational crews demanded patience and adaptability. As Master, he prepared vessels for new charters under tight deadlines while overseeing drills and cargo operations. His philosophy of "safety first and leadership by example" defined his command style. He motivated crews not through authority alone but by sharing workloads and demonstrating empathy, principles he now instills in his students.

### Transforming Maritime Education

When Capt. Mohamed Zaid became Head of CMS in July 2020, the institution had potential but limited recognition. Within five years, he transformed it into a centre of excellence:

- Developed an Advanced Diploma in Marine Operations aligned with IMO model courses.
- Introduced six new IMO short courses domestically, reducing reliance on overseas training.
- Established a fire and survival training centre with free-fall and enclosed lifeboats.
- Commissioned full-mission bridge simulators, opening doors for virtual learning.
- Conducted the Maldives' first ECDIS training in 2021.
- Achieved ISO 9001:2015 certification and IMarEST UK accreditation for specialized courses.

These initiatives allowed Maldivian seafarers to train to international standards without leaving home, making education more accessible and affordable.



## Educational Philosophy and the Blue Economy

For Capt. Mohamed Zaid, maritime education is about more than producing competent officers; it is about national resilience. He envisions CMS as a driver of the blue economy, preparing youth not only for cargo shipping but also cruise tourism, yacht services, offshore industries, and logistics. His leadership emphasizes upskilling, digital literacy, and adaptability to ensure graduates thrive in a rapidly changing global sector.

## Recognition and Influence

Capt. Mohamed Zaid's influence extends beyond CMS. He is an Associate Fellow of the Nautical Institute UK (AFNI) and serves on the Transport Sector Council of the Maldives National Skills Development Authority. He has represented the Maldives at forums such as the Theveli Conference and Ilmee Foavahi, addressing e-learning and revisions to the STCW Convention.

## Closing Reflection

For Capt. Mohamed Capt. Mohamed Zaid, stepping ashore marked not an end but a continuation of service. By reforming CMS, he reduced reliance on foreign training, empowered local seafarers, and broadened maritime career horizons. His philosophy — leadership through example, empathy, and resilience — remains his anchor. "Leadership is about leading by example. Your team is your greatest asset — invest in training them, inspire them, and you can change the way people see challenges and opportunities."

Through that outlook, he is shaping not only today's officers but also tomorrow's leaders, ensuring the Maldives remains steady on its maritime course.



## CAPT. ABDUL LATHEEF MOHAMED The Statesman Mariner

Few people embody the Maldives' maritime journey as fully as Capt. Abdul Latheef Mohamed. With over five decades of service in seafaring, training, and governance, his career reflects the nation's evolution from modest shipping needs to active participation in international maritime policy. Today, as Minister of State for Transport and Civil Aviation and Chairman of the National Search and Rescue Coordination Committee, he continues to guide the nation with the steady hand of a captain and the foresight of a statesman.

## From Deck to Policy

Capt. Abdul Latheef began with an ambitious goal: to earn the Master Mariner's Certificate of Competency from Singapore. For a young Maldivian in the 1970s, this was not just a qualification but a passport to global waters. The certificate gave him international credibility at a time when the Maldives was still emerging on the maritime stage. He later pursued an MBA, complementing his technical expertise with management and policy skills.

Rising from cadet to Master Mariner, he commanded vessels through calm and storm alike. Colleagues recall how, during one violent storm, he kept his crew calm and navigated the vessel safely to port — a testament to his resilience under pressure. These formative experiences shaped a leadership style that combined stamina, judgment, and composure.

## Milestones in Governance

His transition ashore marked the start of his second act: maritime governance. In 2012, he became Deputy Minister of Transport and Communication; by 2013, Minister of State for Transport and Communication; and in 2014, Minister of State for Economic Development, a role he held until 2018. He also served on the board of Maldives Airports Company Ltd., advocating for integrated sea-air strategies. In 2024, he returned as Minister of State for Transport and Civil Aviation, where he continues to shape policy. Capt. Abdul Latheef spearheaded the Maldives Maritime Transport Master Plan, funded by ADB and AUSAID, to streamline transport across dispersed islands. He represented the Maldives at IMO General Assemblies (2017, 2015, 2013) and ILO Labour Conferences (2018–2015), ensuring small-state perspectives informed global debates.

## Champion of Seafarers

He has consistently championed seafarers' welfare. He led efforts to ratify the Seafarers' Identity Document Convention (C185) and the Maritime Labour Convention, protecting Maldivians abroad. In the 1990s, he coordinated nationwide training to bring all seafarers into compliance with STCW 95 requirements, securing global recognition for Maldivian qualifications and opening pathways for international employment.

He also contributed as an author and translator. Works such as *Survival at Sea* and *Fire Fighting Aboard Ships*, along with Dhivehi translations of international regulations, gave Maldivians access to knowledge once locked in foreign languages.

## Philosophy and Diplomacy

"The ocean is the greatest teacher," Capt. Abdul Latheef often reflects. His philosophy blends resilience, humility, and adaptability: "Lead with purpose, serve with humility. A true mariner adapts with the tide but never loses sight of the horizon." He continues to stress lifelong learning, reminding professionals that in a changing field, education is survival.

At the IMO, he spoke on safety and pollution prevention; at the ILO, on labor standards and seafarer welfare. By voicing the concerns of small states, he amplified issues often overlooked, positioning the Maldives as a contributor to global solutions rather than a passive recipient.

## Closing Reflection

Today, Capt. Abdul Latheef stands as a statesman mariner – a bridge between ocean and policymaking chambers. His legacy lies not only in policies shaped, but in the professionals he trained and the dignity secured for Maldivian seafarers.

"The sea teaches us resilience, patience, and clarity. These are the same values we need in leadership and governance." Through those values, he continues to steer the Maldives' maritime destiny – steady, humble, and enduring.



Photo: Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation





# MPL: Powering the Lifeline of an Island Nation



Aminath Shama Abdulla  
Coordinator Operations Overall, Marketing & PR  
Maldives Ports Limited



*Customers buying food items from local shops and markets  
Photo: Maldives Ports Limited*

The Maldives, a tropical archipelago of nearly 1,192 islands scattered across the Indian Ocean, faces a logistical reality unlike any other. Here, connectivity does not come through roads or railways, but through the ocean itself. While other countries might be linked by highways, rail lines, and overland trade corridors, supply chains in the Maldives rely almost entirely on maritime transport. This ocean-based network has become the backbone of economic activity.

In this challenging geographic landscape, Maldives Ports Limited (MPL) has long stood as a national pillar ensuring a seamless flow of goods and services across the country. Since its establishment, MPL has proudly maintained a stable and efficient logistics network supporting everything from food security to economic development. Acting as both gatekeeper and connector, MPL bridges distant islands with the capital, Malé, overcoming geographic isolation with innovation, reliability, and commitment. This connectivity is not merely a matter of transport; it is a lifeline a role MPL continues to uphold and strengthen day by day.



## The Role of Supply Chains in Island Nations

Supply chains are the invisible threads that keep island nations like the Maldives functioning. From groceries and medicine to schoolbooks and building materials, the seamless movement of goods determines quality of life across the atolls. In such a fragmented landscape, the reliability and speed of supply lines are critical.

MPL plays a central role in this ecosystem. Operating out of the **Malé Commercial Harbour** and the **Hulhumalé International Terminal**, MPL ensures smooth coordination with domestic harbors like Malé North Harbor and Malé Southwest Harbor and regional ports like **Kulhudhuffushi Ports Limited (KPL)** and **Hithadhoo Ports Limited (HPL)**. These key logistics hubs enable timely distribution to northern and southern islands, enhancing national supply chain efficiency.

New development projects are underway to further expand port capacity and optimize delivery systems. Given the significant distances between the capital and outlying islands, maintaining cold chains and delivery schedules is particularly vital for perishable goods like fresh food and medicine. Every delivery matters. With every trip across the sea, MPL strengthens the connective chain that links the Maldives together, ensuring that no community is left behind, regardless of how remote.

## Reaching Every Atoll: Real-Life Impact

MPL's efforts extend far beyond shipping containers they reach into the daily lives of every Maldivian. Through a fleet of cargo vessels and digitally coordinated schedules, essential goods such as food, fuel, school supplies, and medical resources are consistently delivered to even the most isolated islands.

## Overcoming Challenges in Island Logistics

Island logistics in the Maldives is an exercise in adaptability. The country's geography, with vast distances between isolated islands, creates complex challenges. Seasonal monsoons often disrupt shipping schedules, while limited port infrastructure in some atolls can delay cargo handling. Additionally, The high cost of marine transport driven by fuel expenses and long sea routes further complicates operations. Yet, MPL continues to rise above these hurdles through innovation and collaboration. Using real-time digital logistics platforms and satellite tracking systems, MPL optimizes routes and quickly adjusts to delays or emergencies. Strategic partnerships with regional carriers and local operators enhance delivery capacity, even to islands with limited access.

Moreover, MPL's collaboration with government bodies and private stakeholders has paved the way for better infrastructure and policy support. Together, these efforts ensure that the country's supply chain remains robust and future-ready. By transforming obstacles into opportunities, MPL proves that effective island logistics is not just possible but sustainable.

## A Lifeline, Not Just a Port

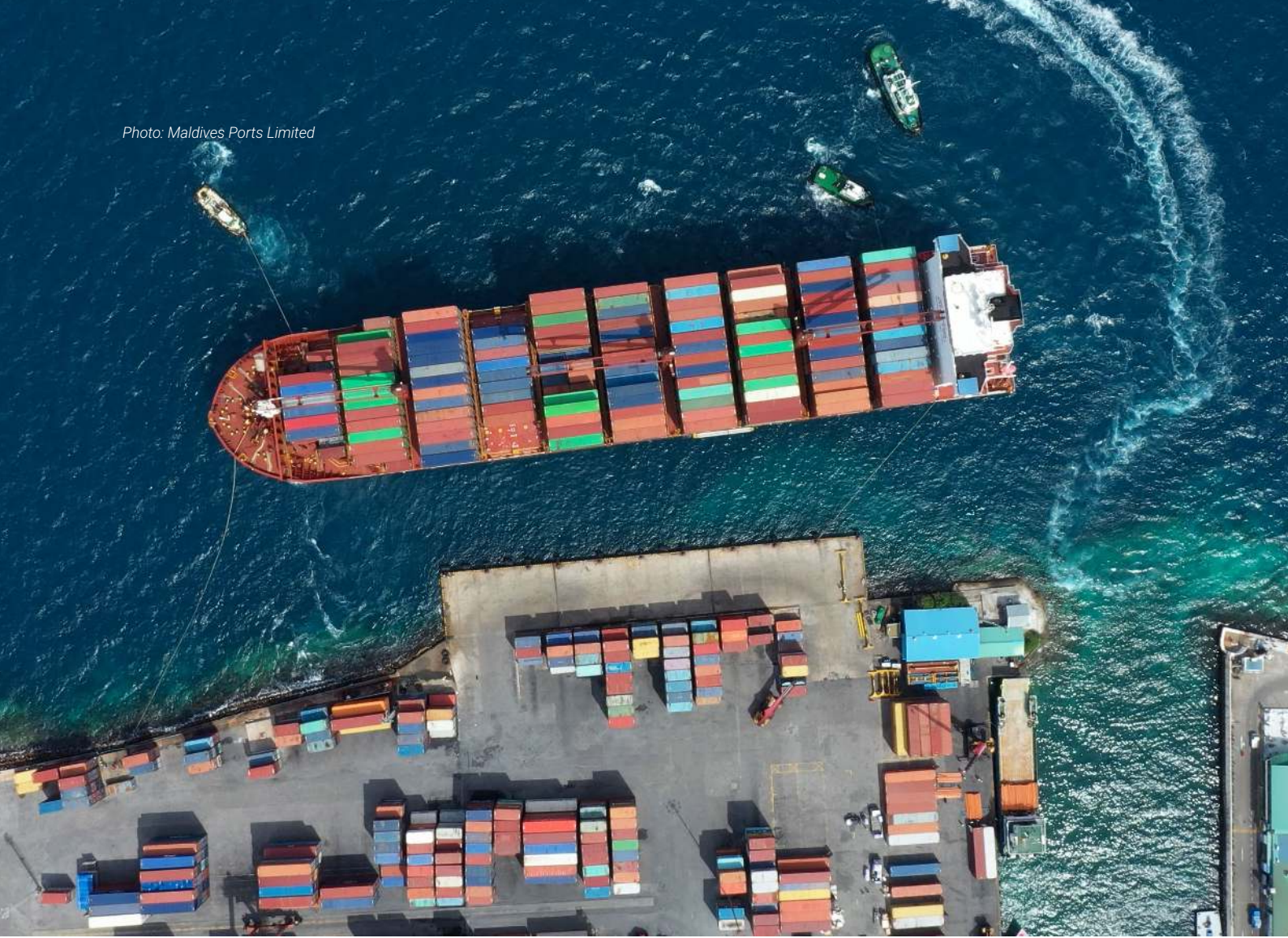
Maldives Ports Limited is more than a port operator it is a lifeline for a nation built on water. Through every shipment and every wave crossed, MPL ensures that communities remain connected, resilient, and supplied with what they need to thrive.

By continuing to invest in infrastructure, embrace technology, and prioritize sustainable practices, MPL is laying the foundation for a stronger, more unified Maldives. As long as the seas connect our islands, MPL will be there steering the flow of goods, supporting lives, and powering the nation forward.

MPL cargo boat operating in Hithadhoo Ports Limited  
Photo: Maldives Ports Limited



Photo: Maldives Ports Limited



# Maldives Global Gateway: Trade & Logistics

*The Maldives' strategic role in international shipping & trade*



Capt. Ahmed Zubair  
Deputy Managing Director  
Maldives State Shipping Company

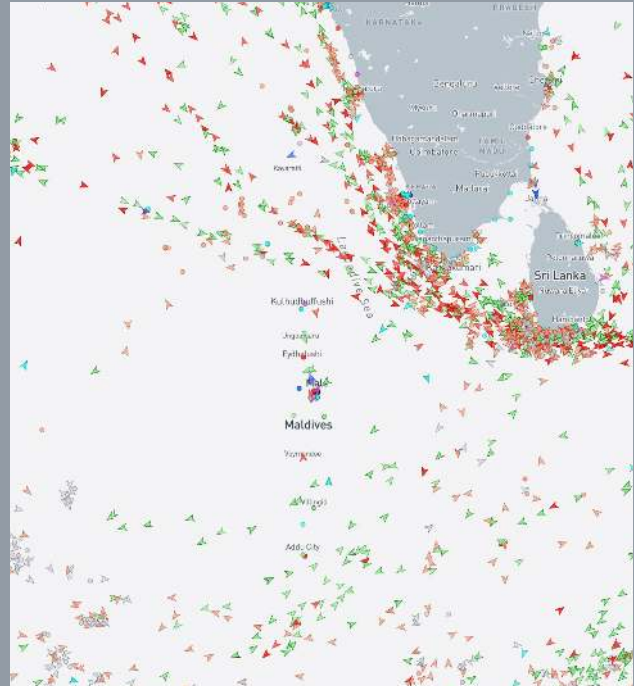
## The Maldives' Strategic Role in International Shipping and Trade

The Maldives is often celebrated as a tropical paradise of pristine beaches and turquoise waters. Yet beyond its allure as a world-class tourist destination, the country's geographical position makes it a potential global hub for trade and logistics. With major sea lanes passing close to its atolls, the Maldives sits at the crossroads of East and West, strategically positioned to play a pivotal role in international shipping and commerce.

## The Strategic Location

The Indian Ocean is one of the busiest maritime highways in the world, carrying nearly two-thirds of global oil shipments and a significant portion of international trade. The Maldives lies just southwest of India and Sri Lanka, along the routes that connect the Middle East, Africa, and Europe to Southeast Asia and the Far East. This location provides the country with a unique opportunity to serve as a gateway for vessels transiting between some of the world's largest and fastest-growing economies.

In an era where speed, efficiency, and security define global supply chains, the Maldives offers both proximity and accessibility. Its position near the main east–west shipping lanes presents opportunities for the nation to establish itself as a critical node in the maritime logistics network.



*Marine Traffic in the Indian Subcontinent Region*

## Emerging Role in Regional Trade

While traditionally reliant on fishing and tourism, the Maldives has begun to explore trade and logistics as engines of economic growth. With increasing globalization and demand for efficient supply chain solutions, the country can leverage its position to provide value-added services such as transshipment, bunkering, and warehousing.

The creation of a National Shipping Company – Maldives State Shipping (MSS), and the establishment of regional ports, such as Kulhudhuffushi in North and Hithadhoo in South, illustrates the nation's ambition to diversify its economy. Plans for shifting Malé Commercial Port to Thilafushi and modernizing port facilities, improving cargo-handling capacity, and creating free trade zones reflect a forward-looking approach to positioning the Maldives as a trade facilitator in the Indian Ocean region.

## Logistics and Connectivity

For the Maldives to realize its full potential as a logistics hub, connectivity is key. Air and sea networks must complement each other, enabling the smooth flow of goods. With Velana International Airport already serving as a significant aviation hub, there is room for integrated sea-to-air logistics services which were inaugurated in 2024.

On the maritime front, the development of deep-water ports and modern container terminals is crucial. Enhanced infrastructure would enable the Maldives not only to handle larger vessels but also to offer transshipment services, easing congestion at nearby major ports such as Colombo, Dubai and Singapore.



# 1,878,543

## Total tourist arrivals

Tourist arrivals increased by **12.1%** during the year 2023, compared to 2022.



*Marine Traffic in the Indian Subcontinent Region*



### Opportunities in Maritime Services

Beyond cargo handling, the Maldives could expand into ancillary maritime services. Bunkering (fuel supply for ships), ship repair and maintenance, crew changes, and maritime training are all areas where the country can position itself competitively. With a steady flow of vessels transiting near its waters, there is potential to create specialized facilities catering to international shipping needs.

Moreover, the Maldives can serve as a platform for green and sustainable shipping initiatives. As the maritime industry increasingly shifts towards decarbonization, the nation could invest in renewable energy based port operations and promote LNG or alternative fuel bunkering stations. This would align with the Maldives' strong commitment to environmental sustainability.

### Challenges to Overcome

Despite the opportunities, several challenges must be addressed. The Maldives' small land area and dispersed geography pose logistical and infrastructural constraints. Building large scale port facilities requires significant investment, advanced technology, and strong partnerships with global players.

Competition is another factor. Regional ports such as Colombo, Dubai, and Singapore are already established leaders in maritime logistics. For the Maldives to attract shipping lines, it must identify niche markets and provide competitive advantages whether through efficient turnaround times, cost effective services, or sustainable practices. Political stability, security, and compliance with international maritime regulations will also be essential to gain the trust of global shipping companies and investors.

## Strategic Partnerships and Policy Framework

To unlock its potential, the Maldives needs to pursue a comprehensive strategy that combines infrastructure development with favorable policy frameworks. Free trade agreements, investment friendly regulations, and public-private partnerships can help accelerate growth in the logistics sector.

Collaboration with neighboring countries and international organizations will also be vital. By aligning itself with regional trade initiatives such as India's "Sagarmala" project or China's Belt and Road Initiative, the Maldives can tap into wider networks of connectivity and investment.

## The Future Outlook

The Maldives is at a crossroads where geography, economics, and global trade dynamics converge. With the right vision, policies, and investments, the country can transform from a tourism dependent economy into a multifaceted hub for trade and logistics.

As supply chains evolve and maritime traffic in the Indian Ocean continues to expand, the Maldives has the potential to emerge as a global gateway in facilitating commerce, fostering regional integration, and contributing to international shipping efficiency.

By positioning itself as a strategic logistics partner, the Maldives can strengthen its economic resilience, create employment opportunities, and play a greater role in shaping the future of global trade.

---

*Photo: Maldives Ports Limited*





# Thilafushi Port: The Maldives' Next Maritime Gateway



Ali Asif  
Business Development Analyst, Business Development & Projects  
Maldives Ports Limited

*A deepwater terminal and bridge network aim to relieve the overburdened Malé Commercial harbor and anchor a modern logistics corridor.*

In a nation that imports close to 90% of its food, fuel, construction materials and consumer goods, seaports are not merely an economic infrastructure. They are national lifelines. When ships idle at anchor or containers queue on cramped yards, the consequences ripple quickly: higher logistics costs, tighter supplies and inflationary pressure. For decades, the Maldives has stretched limited port assets to meet rising demand. That approach is no longer

enough. Congestion at Malé Commercial Harbor (MCH) has moved from episodic to structural, with berths, yards and approach channels operating beyond their intended design. The policy question before the country is not how to eke out incremental efficiencies, but how to deliver a step-change in capacity. The government's answer is Thilafushi: a purpose-built deepwater port conceived to replace the current main gateway and underpin the next phase of growth.

*Photo: Maldives Ports Limited*



## A Lifeline Under Strain

Commissioned in 1986, MCH was designed to handle roughly **50,000 TEUs** annually - an appropriate scale at the time. Reliance on imports has since deepened with urbanization, tourism expansion and nationwide development. Through process improvements, space reconfiguration and satellite facilities such as Hulhumalé Port, Maldives Ports Limited (MPL) has pushed effective capacity to about **80,000 TEUs** on an extremely tight footprint: **4 hectares** in total, with **2.2 hectares** of container yard.

Demand has surged well beyond those dimensions. Between **2010 and 2019**, MCH throughput nearly **tripled** from **45,400 TEUs** to **125,370 TEUs** - compound annual growth rate of 12.47%. After a pandemic-era dip, volumes rebounded to **124,232 TEUs** in 2023, essentially restoring pre-COVID levels. Over **2023-2010**, growth averaged nearly **12%** a year, far outpacing the original design envelope.

The trajectory remains upward. Based on historical trends, population and tourism growth, and trade elasticity, TEU volumes are projected to reach **~293,000 by 2051** - more than double today's throughput. Without new capacity, longer vessel turnarounds, inland congestion and cascading delays will become the norm, eroding supply-chain reliability across the atolls.

## From Projects to Plan

Past initiatives sought to relieve pressure - most notably the iHavan concept for the northern atolls and, in 2022, the Gulhifalhu Port Development intended to supersede MCH. Building on those lessons, the **Thilafushi Port Development** advances a replacement program designed around scale, safety and modern operating standards. It positions the port system for sustained growth rather than a temporary reprieve.



## The Thilafushi Blueprint

At the core of the plan is a deepwater terminal engineered for berth productivity and yard efficiency:

- **Berths and quay.** Two multi-purpose berths on an **800 - meter international quay** with **14.5 - meter** draft, enabling simultaneous operations - e.g., a **260 - meter** vessel alongside a **180 - meter** vessel -while reducing costly waiting time and improving schedule integrity for carriers.
- **Yard capacity and segmentation.** Purpose-designed storage zones sized for a **stacked capacity of 5,310 TEUs (full, including reefers)** and **4,200 TEUs (empties)**, with segregated areas for hazardous cargo and **out-of-gauge (OOG)** loads. Functional separation improves safety and compliance while preserving operational flexibility.
- **Equipment and flow.** A fleet mix centered on **rubber-tired gantry cranes (RTGs)** for precision stacking, **mobile harbor cranes** at the quay and integrated tractor-trailer systems to sustain continuous landside flow. **Container X-ray scanning** and a streamlined interface with the **Customs Freight Station (CFS)** support secure, predictable release.

Designed this way, Thilafushi is not simply “more space”; it is a re-platforming of the operating model - from berth to gate- for faster vessel turns, shorter dwell, and more reliable last-mile delivery.

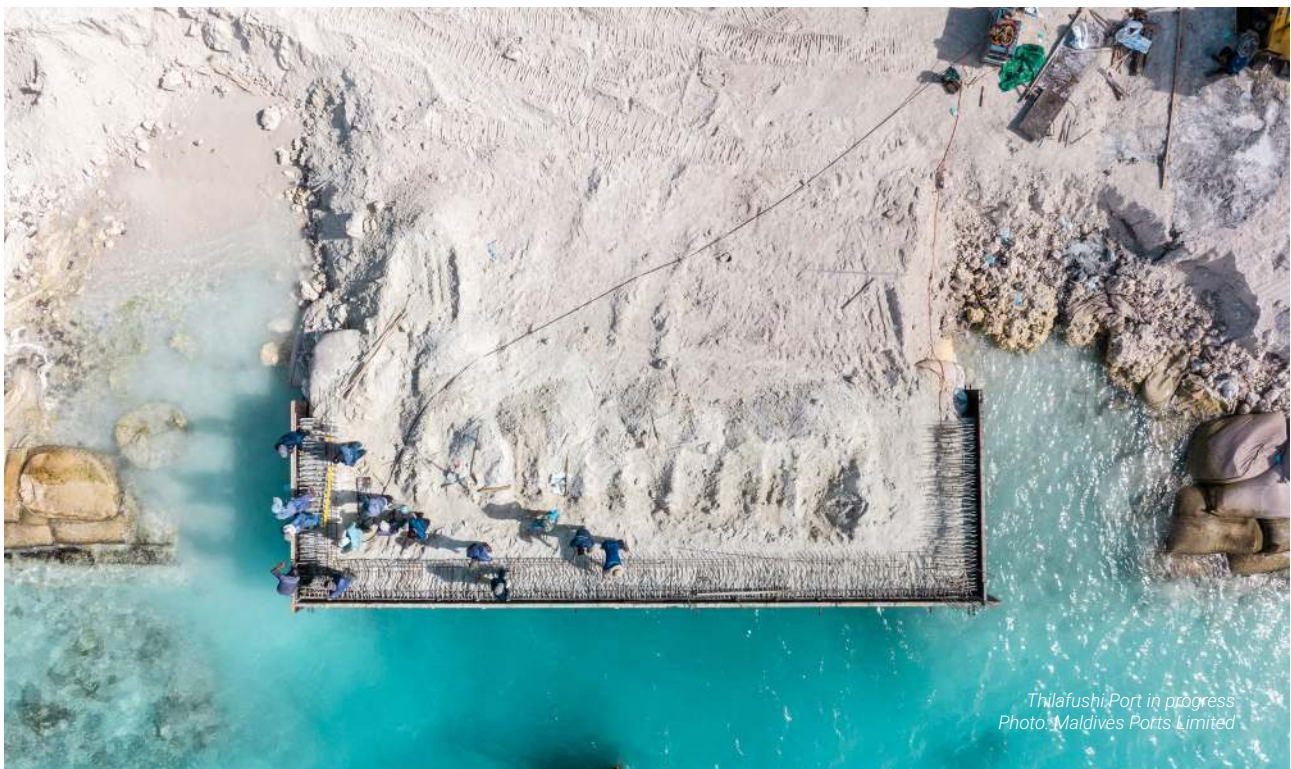
## First Steps Already Underway

The vision is not theoretical. MPL has initiated the **Thilafushi Container Handling Facility** as an interim step to de-risk the transition. The facility includes a **100 - meter international quay** with **14.3 - meter** depth, providing immediate berthing relief while the full terminal advances. It functions both as a pressure valve for current volumes and a proof-of-operations for the shift to Thilafushi.

## The Policy Case

For a small, import-dependent island economy, port capacity is macroeconomics by another name. Each day of delay at the quay can echo through prices, project timelines and household budgets. The Thilafushi program, paired with the bridge network offers a durable remedy: modern capacity, safer working environments, lower logistics frictions and a platform for growth.

The imperative is clear. Completing Thilafushi on schedule will secure the Maldives’ trade lifeline, stabilize costs for businesses and consumers, and keep the country competitive on the busy lanes of the Indian Ocean. In practical terms, it is not just a port project. It is a national resilience strategy.



# Anchoring Maldives' Growth

*Maritime gateway to drive trade, investment, and economic resilience.*



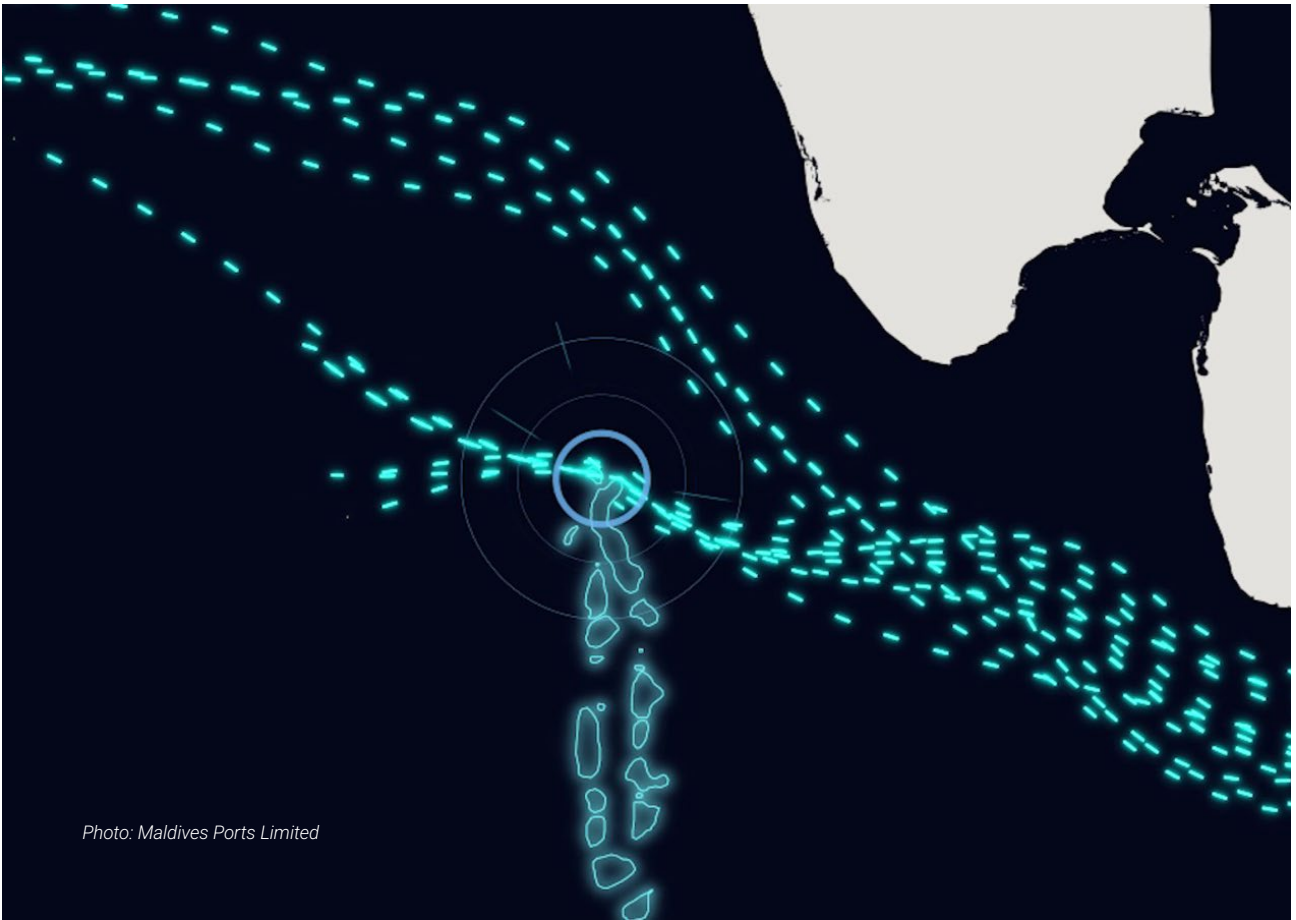
Aishath Shimla  
Chief Learning & Development Officer  
Maldives Ports Limited

The Maldives, an archipelago of 1,192 islands, is situated on the Chagos–Laccadive Ridge, where it has existed for millions of years. Known today for its turquoise waters and coral atolls, the country's contact with the outside world began around 947 AD. Arab and Persian traders were attracted to the Maldives by the abundance of pearls, spices, coconuts, and in particular cowry shells, which were accepted currency from Africa to China until the sixteenth century (Maldivesmission). This makes it evident that Maldives had started the trade between traders of the route, and the location of the Maldives provides significant maritime advantages, surpassing even its famed natural beauty as a national asset.

The country, with a population of approximately 529,000, is entirely dependent on imports to meet its consumption needs, and its economy is primarily sustained by tourism. This is an unusual combination that makes it particularly vulnerable to external shocks. In Q1-2025 total merchandise imports (c.i.f.) reached US\$904.5 million, marking a marginal annual increase of 1%. Growth in food items (+5%). In Q4 2024, the wholesale and retail trade sector emerged as the third-largest contributor to GDP, accounting for 9.3% of overall growth, with a GVA of MVR 2,455 million. The cost, efficiency, and capacity of ports directly affect wholesale prices and retail availability, highlighting the strategic importance of maritime infrastructure.

*Photo: Maldives Ports Limited*





According to Maldives Bureau of Statistics data In Q1-2025, Maldives' real GDP growth strengthened, supported mainly by the construction and tourism sectors, with the fisheries sector also showing a positive trend. These maritime-linked sectors and their performance significantly impact the overall economy. Maldives Ports Limited data indicates that container throughput increased by 7.1% between 2023 and 2024, reflecting a recovery from the downturn experienced during the COVID-19 years. However, the 102-meter quay terminal at Malé Port is now operating near its maximum capacity. Its location within a rapidly expanding metropolitan area has intensified congestion and contributed to rising urban pollution, underscoring the urgent need for environmental and urban redevelopment in Malé City.

However, rising operational costs are driven by limitations in both infrastructure and superstructure. Larger vessels are forced to conduct 'outer anchorage' operations, which are not only costly but also operationally risky. Additionally, the frequent relocation of empty containers continues to add inefficiencies.

Hence, this shows the country requires a modern high-capacity port for seamless operations. The current 15-meter draft quay mainly caters to feeder ships calling from regional transshipment hubs. A strategically developed port would not only meet the needs of the domestic population but absorb future growth in trade volume and national economy to breathe and diversify into new sectors. The development of maritime infrastructure is interconnected with major economic sectors, and advanced economies have effectively capitalized on the transshipment business.

## Maritime Corridors and Regional Competitiveness: Unlocking Investment Potential

The Maldives is strategically located along one of the world's busiest East–West shipping lanes, connecting the Middle East, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and beyond. This makes it a natural point for transshipment and maritime logistics; in 2020, an estimated 59.2 million TEUs were moved along these routes. Situated in close proximity to major trade routes, the Maldives has the potential to tap into nearly 60 million TEUs that pass through these lanes annually. Despite this strategic locational advantage, the window of opportunity to capture a share of the maritime business is rapidly narrowing. Without urgent and substantial investment in port and maritime infrastructure, the Maldives risks falling further behind as regional competitors continue to strengthen their positions.

Currently, the location advantage is much greater to Sri Lanka compared to the Maldives. Sri Lanka's "Ocean Expressway" is located about 10 miles off the port of Hambantota and Dondra point, the southernmost location of Sri Lanka. Ocean Expressway allows ships to sail in straight line rather than sailing in a circular route of the 200 nautical miles of Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of Sri Lanka(ft.lk). This reduces the distance of 400 miles (one day of sailing) and it is the shortest and the fastest possible route from Aden to Singapore. However currently, the Maldives' maritime investments have not yet strategically leveraged its location along key international trade routes, leaving the nation at risk of losing out to regional competitors.

Locating a transshipment port in Thilafushi (the reclaimed island near Malé City) would not be a feasible option. However, Thilafushi has strong potential to be developed into a modern logistics hub. Currently, no other location in the Maldives offers a strategic advantage capable of attracting cargo ships, except for Haa Alif Ihavandhoo, an island in the northernmost atoll, which presents the most suitable site for such development. Haa Alif Ihavandhoo, located approximately 491 nautical miles from Hambantota, offers a prime opportunity for the Maldives to develop a transshipment port closer to the main shipping routes. Such a maritime facility could capture business from vessels using Sri Lanka's Ocean Expressway, which handles roughly %30 of global container trade. Annually, around 35,000 ultra-large container vessels (ULCVs) and bulk carriers, along with 5,000 ultra-large crude carriers (ULCCs), traverse these

lanes (ft.lk). The race to secure this maritime traffic has already begun, with Sri Lanka and India taking the lead. Port expansion projects are currently underway in South Asia, including Vizhinjam in Kerala, where longer berths and increased mother ship capacity are being developed. The project, ramping up from 2024 through 2028, targets multi-million TEU throughput. Mundra Port (Adani) has larger-scale expansion plans to more than double its capacity by the end of the decade as part of India's broader port development initiatives. Additionally, several other private port investments are underway, and the proposed Vadhavan Port aims to create ultra large capacity hubs on India's west coast.

Colombo International Container Terminals and the Colombo West International Container Terminals are continuously upgrading their capacity and expanding to keep Colombo as a major South Asian transshipment hub. Also, Hambantota serves as an asset offering an alternative for transshipment and domestic traffic and logistics development.

### Too Late to Compete, But Not Too Late to Strategize

In my opinion, if the Maldives now pursues a tightly focused complementary strategy rather than trying to compete with or replicate the mega ports of Colombo and India. It is unlikely to get in full scale competition on volume or price given scale of advantages that India and Colombo have now established. The Maldives can adopt a focused, partnership driven strategy by serving and relying on cargo on specific niche transshipment lanes. Also, by positioning itself as a specialized provider of high value maritime services such as cold chain logistics and high value cargo handling. The Maldives can carve out a sustainable role within the Indian Ocean's shipping network. Strategic investment in this sector would not only diversify the economy but also reduce the nation's heavy dependence on tourism, strengthening long term economic resilience.

# Port Operations & Technology:

## A Small-Island Perspective



Abdulla Samir  
General Manager, Technology and Digital Services  
Maldives Ports Limited

Photo: Freepik



When the topic of port technology comes up, the spotlight usually falls on the world's largest hubs such as Singapore, Rotterdam, Shanghai. These mega-ports process volumes on a scale that can be difficult for smaller nations to imagine. Yet, for those of us working in small-island contexts, technology plays an equally critical role. For us, it is not about handling tens of millions of containers a year, but about keeping lifelines open, ensuring resilience, and adapting quickly to circumstances that are constantly changing.



## Adapting Technology to Local Realities

One of the lessons we have learned over the years is that not every off-the-shelf system fits well with our environment. Many commercial solutions, whether SaaS or in-house-hosted, are built with standardized processes in mind. This can make them difficult to adapt when faced with the day-to-day realities of our port operations.

On a small island, operations often involve unexpected situations. A vessel may require an additional service that was not planned. New charges appear as trade patterns evolve. Workflows change rapidly in ways that may not align with the assumptions built into packaged software. In these cases, rigid systems become a limitation rather than a help.

That is why, at Maldives Ports Limited, we build and run our own in-house terminal operating system (TOS). Developed by our ICT team, it is not only a TOS, but also a holistic platform that integrates customer services, accounting, CFS operations, equipment and fleet management, and a multitude of other core and essential functions of the port operations. Its biggest strength is in its flexibility. New changes can be brought in days rather than months. If a workflow shifts, the system adjusts with it. This agility allows us to respond to real operational needs rather than

waiting for vendor updates or costly customizations.

In some respects, our in-house TOS even matches or surpasses features found in global industry-standard systems. That is not because we have the same resources as larger ports, but because our smaller scale allows us to implement changes quickly and efficiently. What might be a multi-year project for a large port can often be delivered in weeks here.

Of course, not everything can or should be developed locally. Certain areas such as accounting and financial reporting require standardized global solutions. For example, we rely on Oracle systems for finance because they ensure compliance and consistency with widely accepted practices. The balance, then, is in knowing where flexibility matters most and where standardization is critical.

## The Cost of Technology in Different Contexts

Another reality we face is the cost of technology. While many modern tools are marketed as affordable, affordability is relative. A subscription fee that may seem negligible in higher-income markets can represent a significant burden in a low- or middle-income setting. This is not to say these solutions are unreasonably priced. It is simply that the global income gap shapes what “affordable” means in practice.

For ports like ours, this means we must be selective. Some areas justify investment in global SaaS solutions, while others are better served by locally built systems. Striking this balance helps ensure that we modernize sustainably, without stretching resources beyond what is realistic.

## Challenges on the Ground

Technology in small-island ports comes with challenges that are often less visible from the outside. Geography itself creates difficulties. Spare parts and equipment take time to arrive, which means even a minor breakdown can cause prolonged disruption. Reliable connectivity is also expensive and not always consistent, so the very systems intended to make port operations more efficient can sometimes be undermined by outages.

Capital requirements add another layer of complexity. Investing in smart cranes, IoT-enabled equipment, or advanced digital infrastructure requires significant funding. While grants and partnerships play an important role, the ongoing costs of maintenance and upgrades remain a constant concern.

Human capital is another area where small nations face pressure. Skilled ICT and logistics professionals are highly sought after worldwide. Many choose to pursue opportunities abroad, leaving local organizations with the challenge of developing and retaining expertise in-house. At the same time, climate change continues to pose a very real risk. Rising sea levels, coastal erosion, and stronger storms directly threaten the infrastructure that ports rely on. Together, these factors shape how we view technology, turning it from a discretionary investment into a critical part of resilience and continuity.

## Opportunities to Move Forward

IoT and automation also present promising avenues. Even relatively modest solutions, such as sensors that track cargo or monitor equipment performance, can have a noticeable impact on efficiency. Renewable energy is another important opportunity. With abundant sunlight, small islands are well positioned to reduce reliance on imported fuel through solar power and storage systems. This not only lowers costs but also builds resilience against external supply shocks.

Artificial intelligence is gradually becoming more accessible, and small-scale predictive models could help optimize resource allocation and reduce waste. Regional collaboration is equally valuable, since working together allows island nations to share knowledge, exchange best practices, and avoid duplication of effort. Above all, human capital investment remains at the center of every opportunity. By training, upskilling, and creating career pathways for local talent, small islands can ensure that technological progress is sustainable and firmly grounded in local capacity.

## Technology as a Practical Tool

One of the things that makes technology adoption in small islands different is how directly it connects to daily life. A system outage does not just mean lost productivity. It can mean delays in medicine reaching a hospital, building materials arriving for a community project, or food supplies making it to market. The ripple effects are immediate and personal.

This is why we prioritize solutions that are practical, flexible, and resilient. For us, technology is not about chasing the latest trend. It is about making sure the port runs smoothly so that the wider economy and community can function reliably.



## A Hopeful Future

The story of port technology in small-island nations will never be identical to that of mega-ports. Our concern is not about handling millions of containers, but about ensuring reliability, efficiency, adaptability of our systems and the resilience of our infrastructure.

At Maldives Ports Limited, we see our scale as an advantage in many respects. It allows us to innovate quickly, to experiment with in-house solutions, and to respond to change faster than larger, more complex systems can. At the same time, we recognize the value of global standards in areas where they matter most, such as finance and compliance.

Our journey is ongoing. Challenges remain, from funding and talent retention to climate adaptation. Yet, the path forward is clear: a balanced approach that leverages both local talent and global best practices.

As our company magazine makes its debut on the international stage, we hope to share this perspective with the wider community. Small-island ports may not dominate the world's shipping headlines, but we are finding our own ways to innovate, adapt, and contribute meaningfully to global trade.

# Modernizing Sea Trade

---

## THE NEW ERA



Superintendent Fathmath Sifza  
Deputy Head of Strategic Management Section,  
Maldives Customs Service

Trade has been in constant motion, reshaping itself with every era. However, in today's interconnected world, the pace of change is unprecedented. Digital progress and cutting-edge technologies, when intertwined with commerce, have unlocked prospects that were unimaginable just a decade ago. From artificial intelligence guiding smarter customs processes to blockchain ensuring transparency, and from

automated ports to real-time cargo tracking, technology has become the backbone of modern trade. This rapid transformation is not only redefining efficiency and security but also creating growth for nations, enabling small economies like Maldives to integrate into global supply chains.

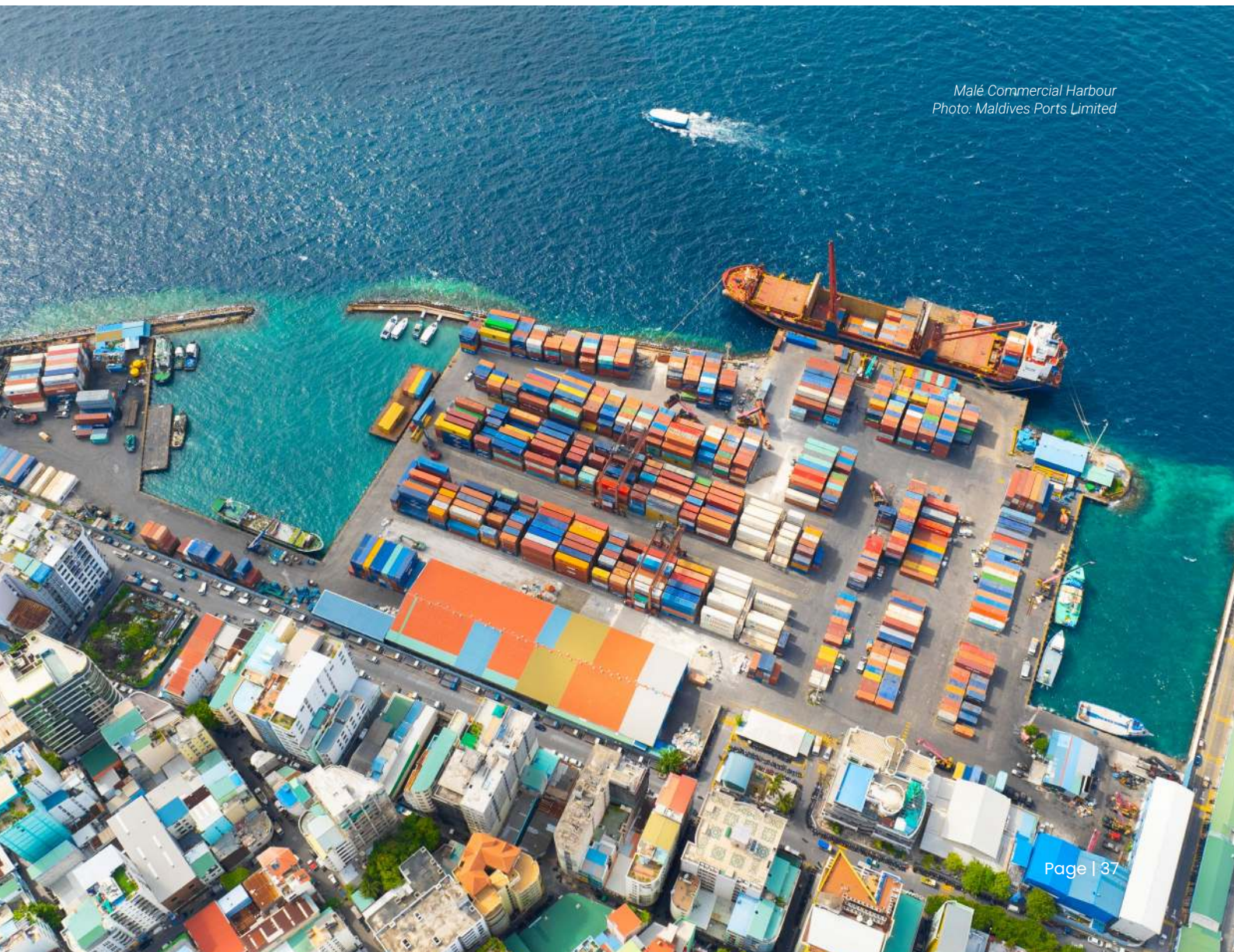
*Customs checking the cargo  
Photo: Maldives Customs Service*



Maldives being a nation that relies heavily on import for almost every essential, places immense pressure on the seaport, particularly Malé Commercial Harbour. It is the primary entrance for cargo to enter the country, often operating at its full capacity. Congestion has become a daily reality, with limited docking space and logistical bottlenecks slowing down clearance processes. Recognizing these challenges, the government and Maldives Ports Limited (MPL) have already set in motion ambitious plans for the port.

paperwork, improved coordination among regulatory bodies, and accelerated administrative processing. Aside from this, Maldives Customs Service (MCS) marked a major step forward, introducing risk-based cargo classification (green, yellow, red channels) and enabling fully digital documentation submissions. This integration with multiple agencies cut clearance times significantly. These initiatives show how MCS and MPL are reshaping sea trade.

The launch of Tradian, the National Single Window in April 2025, has placed digital integration at the center of trade facilitation. By unifying services such as shipping agent registration, vessel arrival submissions, and sea cargo manifest filings into a single online gateway, Tradian eliminates the need for multiple agency visits and, since June 2025. This has significantly reduced



Malé Commercial Harbour  
Photo: Maldives Ports Limited



Digital tools and artificial intelligence are now used to boost the speed of cargo clearance and facilitate trade. Among the most impactful innovations is the AI-assisted Tariff Search Module, which accelerates the classification of cargo, reducing human error and processing delays. The Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) Program, introduced in early 2024, further strengthens trust-based trade by allowing compliant traders faster processing and reduced inspection. Collectively, such measures not only enhance transparency and data accessibility but also enable smoother cargo flows through MPL's facilities.

Along with digital transformation, MPL and MCS need to invest heavily in infrastructure to boost speed and capacity. One of the key developments in recent times, is the Hulhumalé Customs Terminal, which shifted the clearance operations from the congested Malé Commercial Harbour. Looking ahead, MPL is advancing plans for a major port relocation to K.Thilafushi, with a state-of-the-art facility designed to handle 220,000 Twenty-foot equivalent units. This expansion is set to eliminate long standing bottlenecks. At the same time, MCS is actively seeking funding from international bodies to acquire a container scanner, which would strengthen the security and speed up the cargo inspection process. When paired with MCS's digital systems

and risk-based processing, these infrastructure upgrades promise a step change in efficiency, enabling faster customs operations and significantly increasing overall cargo throughput.

The world is introducing newer technologies and innovations as we speak, and it is in the interest of MCS and MPL to closely observe emerging technologies, that will redefine port and cargo clearance. One notable technology is Muon Tomography, a next-generation cargo scanning method using cosmic rays to create 3D images of containers within seconds. Similarly, OCR based document classification, automates the sorting of invoices, bills of lading and other trade related documents. This reduces human error and speeds up document processing time. Such innovations complement the future goals set on improving our seaport. Resulting in a smarter, faster, and more resilient trade environment for the Maldives.

# Careers in MARITIME INDUSTRY



Capt. Mohamed Zaid  
Head of Centre, Centre for Maritime Studies  
The Maldives National University

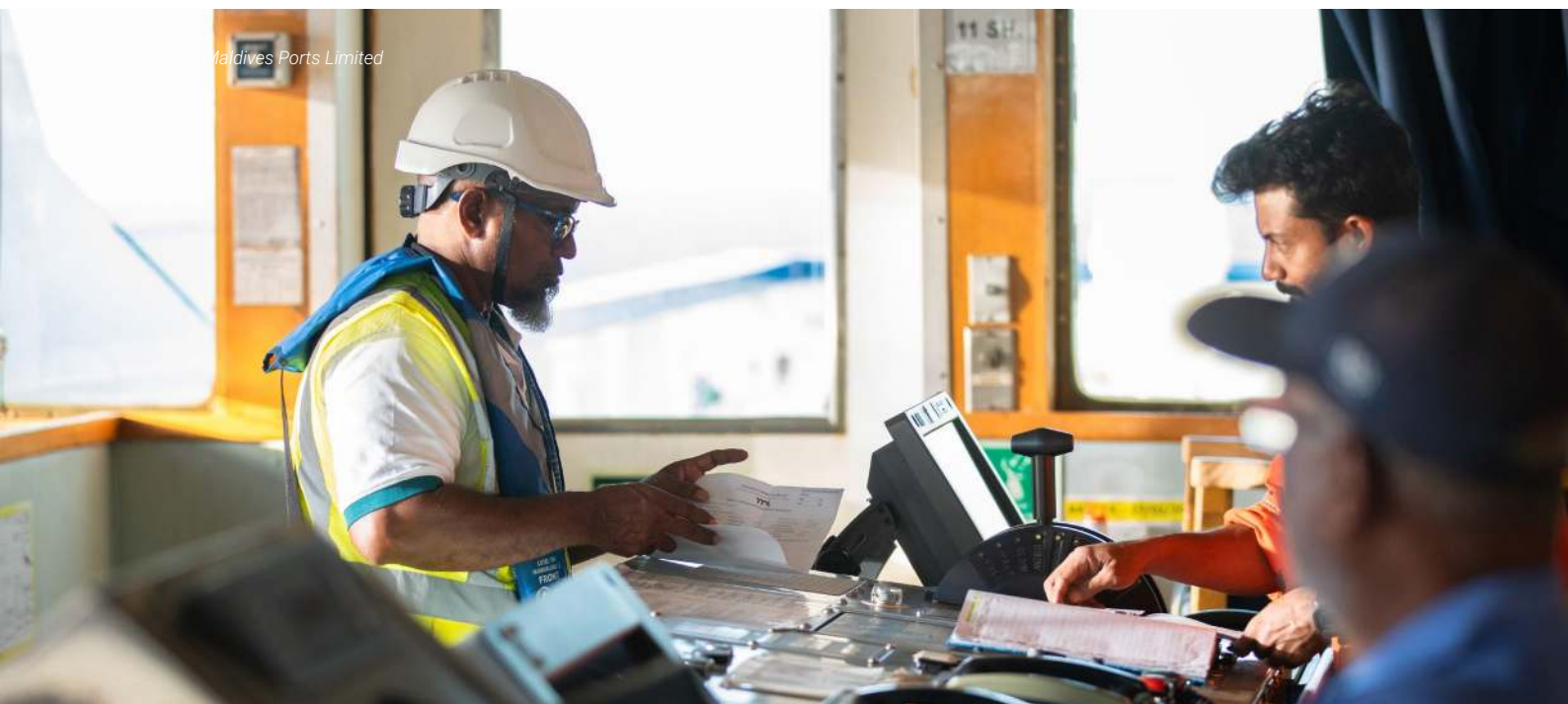
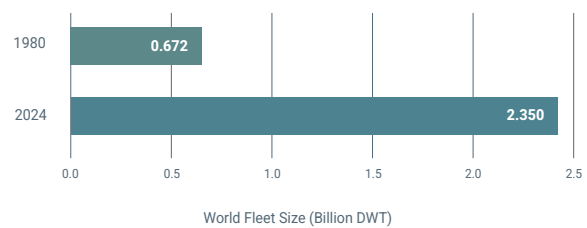
Modern maritime trade emerged in the 19th century, beginning with the Baltic Exchange's trading rules in 1823, and technical standards for vessels commenced with Lloyd's Register's classification of the first iron vessel in 1837. Subsequent milestones, such as the ILO's adoption of officer competency standards in 1936 and the establishment of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in 1948, laid the foundation for today's global frameworks on safety, professionalism, and regulation.

The scale of the industry is evident in the growth of the world fleet, which expanded from 0.672 billion deadweight tons (DWT) in 1980 to over 2.35 billion DWT in January 2024. This growth reflects not only increased shipping capacity but also the interdependence of registries, operators, ports, finance, shipyards, and insurers in sustaining global trade.

In the Maldives, the example of Maldives Shipping Limited (MSL) - which operated 40 vessels between 1967 and the 1990s and maintained overseas offices - illustrates the significant scope of maritime employment both at sea and ashore.

Building on this historical and global context, this article provides a concise overview of maritime careers available globally and in the Maldives, covering opportunities at sea as well as onshore roles.

**Growth of World Fleet (1980 - 2024)**



Maldives Ports Limited

## Introduction

As of January 2024, the global merchant fleet comprised 108,789 seagoing vessels of 100 gross tons and above, with a combined capacity of approximately 2.35 billion DWT (UNCTAD 2024). These vessels are responsible for transporting nearly %90 of world trade, making shipping the backbone of international commerce. The industry is sustained by an estimated 1.89 million seafarers (ICS n.d.), supported by a wide range of maritime stakeholders and related professionals across the globe.

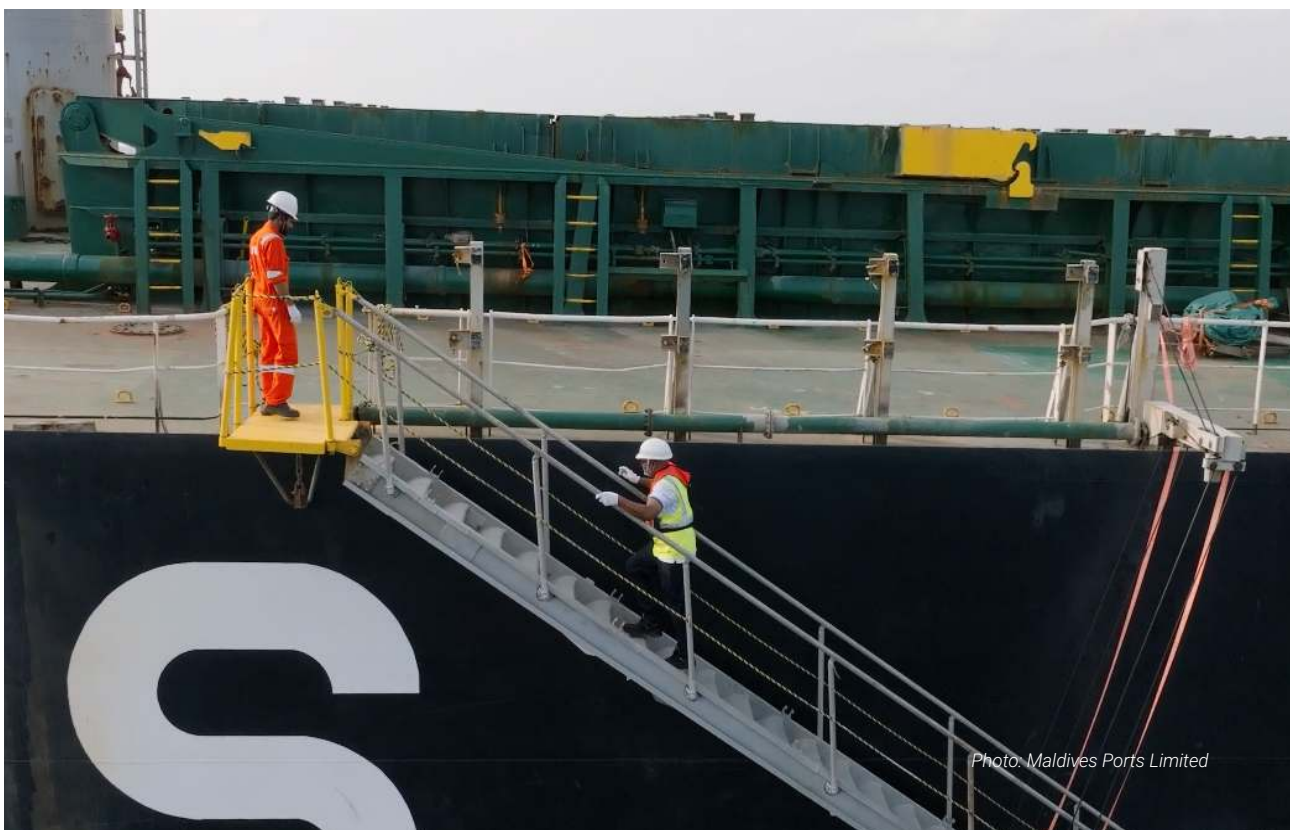
This article will focus on a brief overview of the maritime industry, its stakeholders, maritime careers at sea and onshore, basic career guidance for both maritime sectors, and a conclusion.

## Maritime Industry Overview and Its Stakeholders

The international maritime industry is a distinctive and complex global sector of the world economy, integrating diverse stakeholders and interconnected with engineering, finance, and insurance networks. A key strength of the industry lies in its robust regulatory framework, coupled with employment conditions that set it apart from most other sectors (Kazantsev 2023).

For instance, in the case of a bulk carrier trading worldwide, the chain of stakeholders involved in vessel operations is extensive. These include the ship and engine builders, naval architects, ship's registry, crew, owners, technical managers, operations managers, charterers, ship brokers, classification societies, hull and machinery underwriters, P&I clubs, ports and terminals, bunker suppliers, ship chandlers, IT service providers, and ship repair facilities, among others. Each of these actors contributes specialized expertise that is essential for the safe and efficient operation of the vessel.

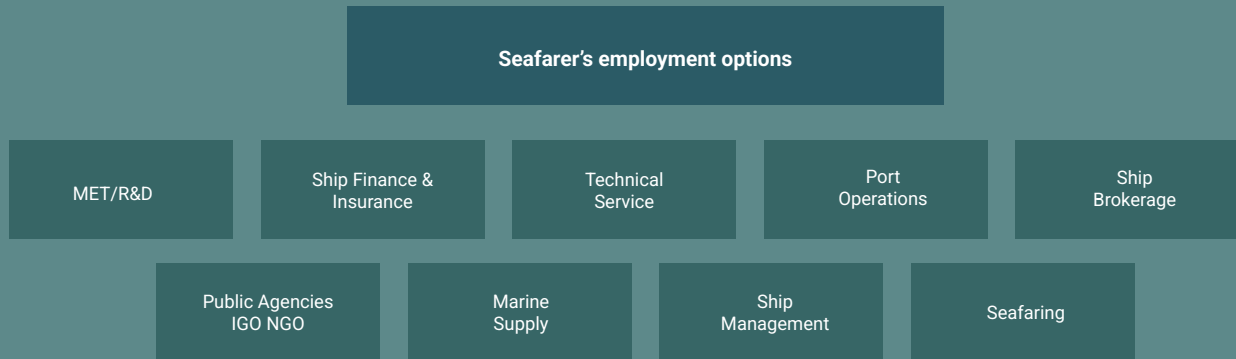
Beyond ship operations, a wide range of professionals and institutions play vital roles in supporting the maritime industry. These include international bodies such as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), professional organisations like the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS), the Baltic and International Maritime Council (BIMCO), International Association of Classification Authorities (IACS), and The Nautical Institute, as well as maritime education and training providers. Together, they contribute to sustaining and developing the maritime industry on a global scale.



*Photo: Maldives Ports Limited*

## Maritime Careers at Sea and Onshore

Having outlined the key stakeholders involved in the maritime industry, the wide range of career opportunities available in the maritime industry can be better understood, as illustrated in the figure below (Kazantsev 2023).



*Seafarer's employment options. Source (Kazantsev 2023)*

The seafaring career is briefly described in the following paragraph from the website of the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS).

A good salary, opportunities to see the world, ongoing training to progress your career and the community feel on board, are just a few of the fantastic opportunities available to seafarers. Seafaring is a challenging career, which can see you spend months at a time at sea in demanding yet exciting conditions, but the rewards are great. You will have opportunities for growth that can see you climb the career ladder, progressing to more senior roles at sea or transitioning to roles on land and making friends and memories that will last you a lifetime. (ICS n.d.)

Having briefly described what a seafaring career is about, the certification requirements for seafarers are formally regulated by the International Maritime Organization

(IMO) through the Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW) Convention 1978, as amended. Meeting these standards requires rigorous academic study, practical training, and sea service. Typically, it takes around four years to complete the requirements to qualify as an officer or engineer, and approximately seven years to attain senior positions such as ship captain or chief engineer (The Maldives National University 2025, Hong Kong Maritime and Port Development Board 2025)

When considering onshore maritime careers, one of the best examples of employability for maritime professionals is Singapore, widely recognized as a leading global maritime hub. In 2023, shipping contributed nearly 43 billion Singapore Dollars to the national economy, representing approximately 7% of Singapore's GDP. The industry also employed nearly 170,000 professionals across diverse sectors such as port operations, shipping, and logistics (Ong 2024, Falak Medina 2025)

According to the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore,

Today, Maritime Singapore is home to more than 170 international shipping groups, not only in the traditional container, bulk and tanker sectors but also in the offshore and LNG markets. Besides a high concentration of international shipping groups, Maritime Singapore offers a comprehensive range of both technical and commercial maritime services such as finance, broking, insurance, surveying, legal and arbitration. (MPA Singapore 2025)

This example demonstrates how a strong and diversified maritime cluster can provide a wide array of career opportunities for onshore professionals, extending well beyond shipboard employment and highlighting the importance of maritime education and training in preparing a skilled workforce.

Before describing maritime careers in the Maldives' maritime industry, it is important to recall the contribution of the government-owned Maldives Shipping Limited (MSL), as highlighted in the World Bank Introductory Economic Report of Maldives (1980). Learning from this history can help guide efforts to revive industry and build a more resilient economy, less dependent solely on tourism and fisheries.

In 1976, MSL-managed companies were operated as an integral part of MSL's overall structure. These companies generated revenues of approximately USD 14.5 million, compared with USD 19.8 million from regular MSL operations (World Bank 1980). This demonstrates the significant role that shipping once played in supporting national income and employment.

## Conclusion

The maritime industry remains one of the most dynamic and essential pillars of the global and national economy, offering a wide range of professional pathways both at sea and onshore. Careers at sea typically begin with cadetship and progress through officer ranks to senior roles such as ship captain or chief engineer.

A well-established career pathway in the maritime sector is the transition from seagoing professions to shore-based roles in areas such as ship management, ports and terminal operations, logistics, marine insurance, maritime law, and education. This progression facilitates the continuous transfer of knowledge and expertise between shipboard and land-based sectors, thereby enhancing the resilience and sustainability of the industry. In addition, individuals with the required academic qualifications may pursue undergraduate studies in maritime disciplines, further broadening their career opportunities.

For the Maldives, with its strategic location astride major sea lanes and its extensive maritime heritage, the industry offers significant potential to diversify the national economy beyond its current dependence on tourism and

Looking ahead, Singapore can serve as a valuable model for the Maldives in shaping its maritime sector. Situated across both the northern and southern hemispheres of the equator and comprising nearly 1,200 islands, the Maldives hosts a diverse maritime industry encompassing shipping, ports and terminals, logistics services, coastal tourism, local sea transportation, marine surveying and insurance, maritime law, and boatbuilding.

This dynamic sector presents wide-ranging opportunities for Maldivians—both women and men—to build careers as maritime professionals and to contribute to the sustainable growth of the nation's blue economy.

To strengthen this development, the Maldives National University offers seafaring courses, while a range of non-seagoing undergraduate and postgraduate programs are available through international universities, including the World Maritime University (The Maldives National University 2025, WMU 2025).



UNCTAD Train for Trade Modern Port Management Course Cycle 3 Maldives  
Photo: Maldives Ports Limited

fisheries. Reviving the tradition once exemplified by Maldives Shipping Limited, while learning from successful models such as Singapore, can support the creation of sustainable maritime careers for Maldivian youth.

By investing in maritime education, strengthening partnerships with global institutions such as the World Maritime University, and promoting career awareness, the Maldives can develop a skilled workforce capable of serving not only domestic needs but also the international maritime community. Such efforts will contribute to economic resilience, enhance national participation in global trade, and secure long-term employment opportunities for the next generation.

# Maritime Security & Emergency Services in the Maldives



Hussain Firaz  
Sub Inspector of Police  
Maldives Police Service

For the Maldives, the ocean is both a blessing and a challenge. Our nation stretches across a vast expanse of the Indian Ocean, with more than 180 inhabited islands scattered over 90,000 square kilometers of sea. This unique geography makes maritime transport the backbone of daily life, but it also presents serious challenges for law enforcement and emergency services.

Unlike on land, where checkpoints and patrols can be easily managed, the scale at sea is far greater. With more than 18,000 registered vessels in the Maldives, and many more unregistered ones, monitoring and ensuring compliance is a daunting task. Currently, there is no comprehensive mechanism to track all vessel movement across the country, which creates vulnerabilities for both maritime security and safety.



*Photo: Maldives Police Service*

## Challenges at Sea

Ensuring order and safety in Maldivian waters is not without difficulties. One of the most pressing issues identified by the Marine Police is the widespread operation of vessels without the proper licenses or registration. This lack of regulation means that vessels often go untracked, making it difficult to hold operators accountable in the event of accidents or unlawful activity. Equally concerning is the operation of boats that lack the required safety equipment or valid seaworthiness certificates. Without basic life-saving gear such as lifejackets, fire extinguishers, or functioning communication devices, passengers and crew are placed at significant risk every time they set out to sea.

Another recurring challenge is the employment of foreigners on vessels without the appropriate visas. While foreign expertise and labor contribute to the maritime sector, working without the correct documentation undermines immigration regulations and complicates efforts to maintain lawful operations at sea. Collectively, these violations pose a serious threat to maritime order. They not only endanger the lives of those directly involved but also create blind spots in the wider monitoring of vessel activity. Such gaps make it easier for more serious crimes, such as drug trafficking and the illegal transport of goods to take root.



## The Marine Police Framework

To meet the wide-ranging demands of policing the seas, the Marine Police operates through a structured system of specialized departments:

### Administration Development and Awareness Unit:

Raises public awareness on maritime safety and ensures administrative efficiency.

### Marine Enforcement and Operations Department:

The frontline unit responsible for patrols, law enforcement, and emergency response.

### Marine Investigation Department:

Handles investigations into crimes at sea, including illegal fishing and maritime accidents.

### Maintenance and Vessels Management:

Keeps the fleet in working condition and ready for deployment.

### Regional Vessel Management:

Distributes and oversees vessels across atolls to ensure decentralized emergency coverage.

### Marine Engineering:

Provides technical expertise to maintain safety, fuel efficiency, and operational standards.

This structure ensures that every aspect of maritime policing, from prevention to response, is covered under a unified system.

## Building Capacity and Infrastructure

In response, the Maldives Police Service, through its Strategic Plan 2028–2024, is investing heavily in capacity building and infrastructure development across the atolls. New Marine Police Units are being established outside Malé to decentralize services and ensure faster response times for island communities.

To address the shortage of skilled vessel operators, the Marine Police has partnered with the Maldives National University to introduce the Niyami Course, a maritime navigation training designed to enhance the skills of current officers and build a new generation of qualified captains and vessel operators. This initiative is a step towards creating a professional, well-trained workforce capable of managing the nation's maritime security challenges.

## Strengthening Operations

A major leap forward in operational readiness is the establishment of a sophisticated operations room for the Marine Police. Once fully functional, it will provide real-time coordination, and decision-making support for both security and emergency operations.

The Marine Police also conducts joint operations with agencies such as Maldives Customs Service, tackling issues like illegal alcohol trade and conducting search operations on container vessels. These collaborations ensure that law enforcement efforts are not limited to surface-level patrols but extend into inspections and organized crime prevention.

## Emergency Response

The geographical spread of the Maldives means that maritime accidents are an inevitable risk, from capsized dhonis to engine failures far from shore. The Marine Police plays a critical role in search and rescue missions, working closely with the Maldives National Defence Force Coast Guard, resorts, island councils, and local seafarers. Such cooperation ensures that help reaches those in distress, even in remote parts of the country.

## Looking Ahead

Maritime security in the Maldives is a complex task shaped by geography, infrastructure limitations, and the sheer volume of vessel traffic. Yet through targeted investments in training, technology, and inter-agency collaboration, the Marine Police is steadily building a stronger, more responsive presence across our seas.

The mission is not only to enforce the law but also to protect lives, ensure safer seas, and support the communities whose survival depends on the ocean. As the Marine Police continues to expand and modernize, one message is clear: securing the Maldivian seas is a shared responsibility, and a priority for the future of our nation.



# Safeguarding Our Seas: The Lifeline of the Maldives

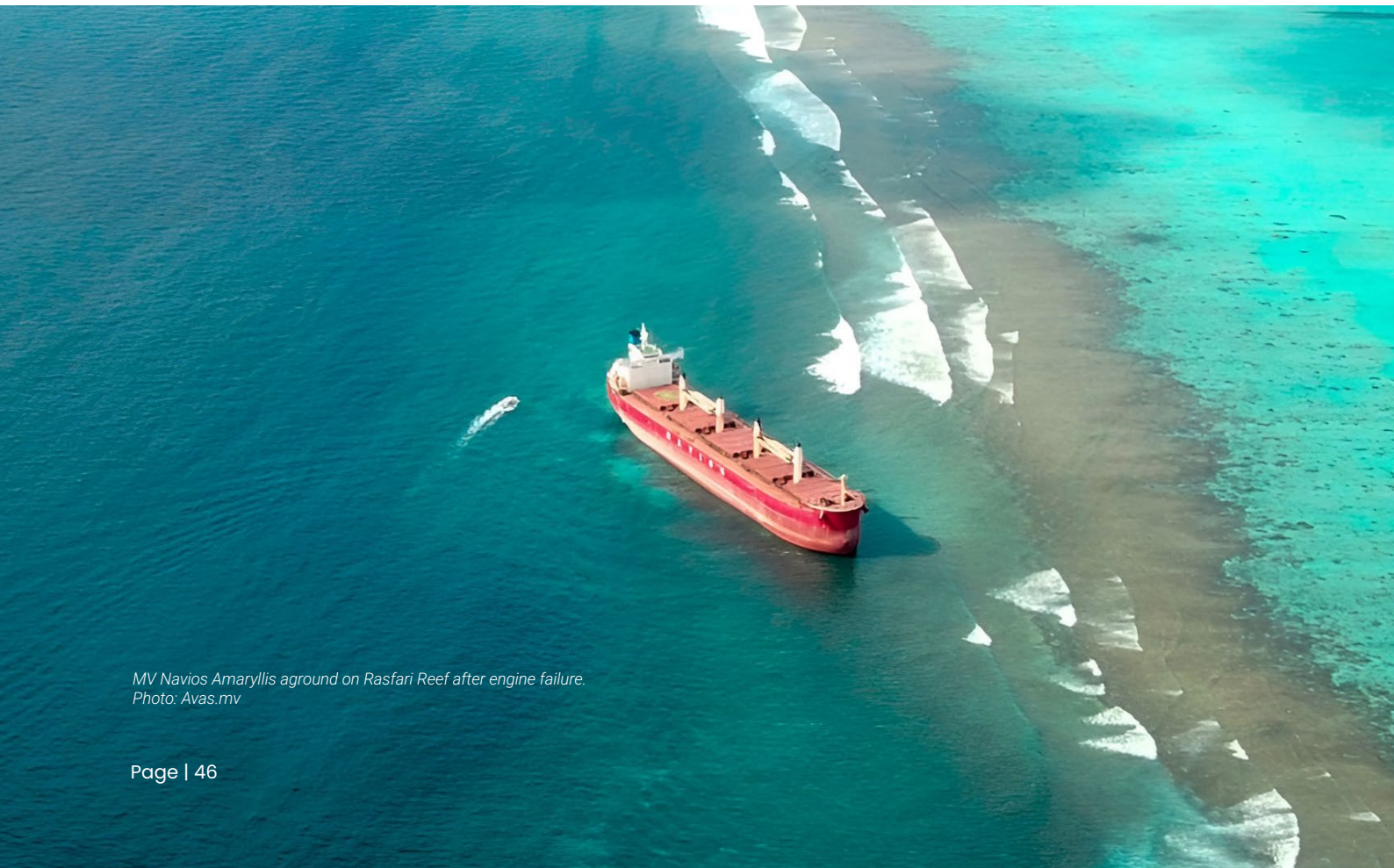


Lieutenant Colonel Ahmed Siya  
Director: Coast Guard Training and Research Development  
Maldives National Defence Force - Coast Guard

For the Maldives, the sea is not just a backdrop, it is life itself. Stretching across nearly 90,000 square kilometers of the Indian Ocean, this island nation breathes, thrives, and struggles through the waters that surround it. From the turquoise lagoons that draw millions of tourists to the fisheries that sustain thousands of families, the ocean is the country's heartbeat. Our culture, heritage, and economy are all bound to it.

Yet, the seas that give us so much are now under threat. Climate change, unchecked development, and evolving security challenges are placing unprecedented pressure on the nation's future.

This is why the call to **"Safeguard Our Seas"** is more than just a slogan — it is a mission of survival. Protecting the marine environment preserves coral reefs, fisheries, and beaches for future generations, while maritime security ensures sovereignty, stability, and resilience. Together, these represent a responsibility: to guard the ocean's natural wonders and to defend the nation's security.



*MV Navios Amaryllis aground on Rasfari Reef after engine failure.  
Photo: Avas.mv*

Snorkeling in the Maldives  
Photo: Unsplash/phaisalphotos



### Nature's Fragile Gift

As a Maldivian, I've grown up surrounded by the beauty of our coral reefs some of the most vibrant and diverse in the world. These reefs are not just natural wonders; they are part of our identity and play a crucial role in shielding our islands from erosion and storms.

But today, that beauty is under threat. Rising sea temperatures have led to widespread coral bleaching, weakening our reefs and the rich biodiversity they support. These changes are not just environmental; they are deeply personal. They affect our fishing, our tourism, our way of life.

In response, we've started taking action. Beach nourishment and reef restoration projects are underway across several islands. These efforts hold promise, but demand long-term commitment and community involvement to succeed.

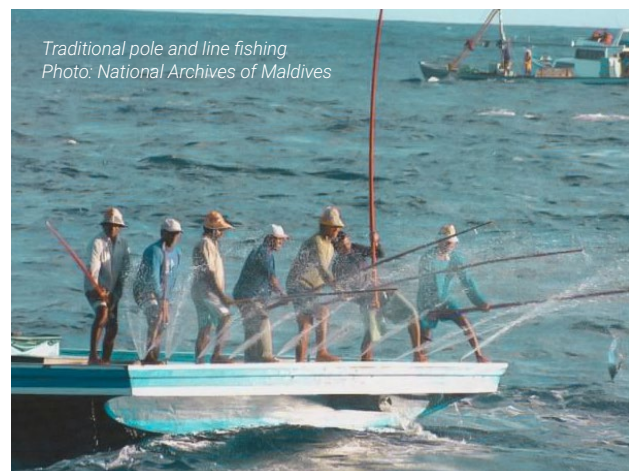
Still, coastal erosion continues to be one of our biggest challenges. Climate change, combined with unsustainable development, is quite literally eating away at the land beneath our feet. For us, this isn't a distant problem, it's happening now.

If we want to protect our future, we must place sustainable shoreline management and ecosystem-based adaptation at the heart of our national strategies. This is not just about saving nature; it's about saving our home.

### Fishing Industry: Sustaining Livelihoods

Fishing has always been at the core of Maldivian life, supporting thousands of livelihoods. Unlike in many parts of the world, overfishing is not the main issue here. Instead, we face the persistent threat of Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing.

Foreign vessels intruding into Maldivian waters put both resources and livelihoods at risk. Combating this requires stronger monitoring, enhanced maritime surveillance, and stricter enforcement of international regulations. At the same time, promoting sustainable fishing and responsible aquaculture will ensure marine resources continue to provide prosperity without harming ecological balance.



Traditional pole and line fishing  
Photo: National Archives of Maldives

Bleached Coral Reef  
Photo: XL Catlin Seaview Survey/March 2016



### Tourism: Protecting What Attracts

Tourism is the lifeblood of our economy, supporting families and communities across the Maldives. But it also brings challenges. Poor waste management, reef damage, and unplanned coastal development threaten the very ecosystems that draw visitors to our shores.

Resorts and tourism operators must take the lead in embracing sustainable practices - reducing waste, safeguarding coral reefs, and supporting conservation efforts, so that our islands remain as beautiful tomorrow as they are today.



Foreign vessel caught for IUU fishing in Maldives waters.  
Photo: mndf.gov.mv

### Securing the Blue Frontier

As Maldivians, we know that protecting our seas goes beyond just environmental efforts. Our vast Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), far larger than our landmass brings complex security challenges. Illegal fishing, smuggling, trafficking, and other unregulated activities threaten not just our marine wealth, but our sovereignty.

Maldives National Defence Force Coast Guard plays a pivotal role as the nation's maritime shield. Through regular patrols, advanced monitoring systems, and strong regional partnerships, they help deter illegal actions and boost search-and-rescue efforts. New technologies like satellite tracking, drones, and smart surveillance are strengthening this work, while intelligence-sharing across the Indian Ocean region helps us build a safer, more secure maritime future.

### A Shared Responsibility

Safeguarding the seas of the Maldives cannot fall on one institution alone. It requires a **whole-of-nation approach** government, industry, civil society, and communities working hand in hand.

In the end, **"Safeguarding Our Seas"** means more than just protecting water. It means protecting livelihoods, sovereignty, and identity. It means ensuring that the turquoise waters, coral reefs, and marine life remain sources of pride and prosperity for generations to come.

# Navigating the Storm: Life & Safety at Our Ports



Fathimath Umaina  
Administrative Executive, Nautical Services  
Maldives Ports Limited



Few professions carry the kind of daily risks that marine pilots face. Embarking on a swaying rope ladder in the middle of the night, under the blazing sun, or sometimes in heavy rain and strong winds, is not a task for the faint-hearted. A single misstep could mean falling into dark, turbulent waters and putting life at stake. Yet, this is the reality for pilots at Maldives Ports Limited (MPL), who guide massive vessels safely into harbour through some of the most unpredictable monsoon weather in the Maldives.

Malé Harbor waters have become increasingly congested, with new larger vessels calling at the port daily. Navigating through harbour waters has become riskier, yet pilots manage these movements safely for both inbound and outbound vessels. While the Maldives is world-renowned for its beauty, those who work the waters know the sea can turn dangerous in an instant. For the Harbour master, pilots and the Nautical Services Department (NSD), “Navigating the storm” is not just a phrase, it is their daily responsibility. Each decision they make ensures not only the flow of vital imports into the country but also the safety of the international vessels, their crew, and harbour waters they serve.

## The Challenge of Monsoon Seas

The Maldives experiences two distinct monsoon systems: the Hulhangu (Southwest Monsoon) from late May to August, and the Iruvai (Northeast Monsoon) beginning in late August. Traditionally predictable, these seasons have become increasingly irregular in recent years. Between 2017 and 2024, mariners noted that the Hulhangu monsoon no longer followed its usual patterns.

In 2025, weather conditions have become particularly harsh, with rough seas at anchorage points causing ships to sway and drag anchors, often requiring tug-assisted manoeuvres. Cargo operations were halted for hours, sometimes days, due to unsafe conditions. Limited berthing space meant larger vessels had to be unloaded at working anchorages using MPL barges and tugboats.

Looking ahead, the development of Thilafushi Port brings hope. Once operational, the port will provide expanded space and infrastructure, reducing weather-related delays. Vessels will berth alongside the new port facilities, avoiding the need for extended anchorages and offloading at sea.

## Safety First: Protocols at Sea

At MPL, the safety of pilots, crews, and vessels comes first, especially during bad weather. Guided by Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), the NSD ensures that shipmasters and agents receive real-time weather updates via VHF channels 10 and 16. Advisories such as “prepare for bad weather anchor dragging” are issued to every international vessel in Malé harbour waters.

Weather forecast information is sourced directly from the Maldives Meteorological Service, while navigational tools like the Universal Automatic Identification System (UAIS) help pilots monitor and track each vessel’s position, movements, and status, enhancing overall situational awareness. Additionally, Radar assists during low visibility, although smaller boats remain harder to detect.

A critical aspect of safety involves how pilots board vessels. As per the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), Regulation V/23, all international ships must provide a properly rigged and certified pilot ladder. This ensures that even in rough seas, pilots can board safely. Yet, when weather conditions are extreme, the risk can be too high. After careful discussions between the vessel master, Harbour Master, pilots, and the NSD, movements may be postponed or cancelled, even if it causes operational delays. Life and safety always take precedence here at MPL.

## Interview with the Harbour Master

To understand the human side of navigating storms at sea, we spoke with the Harbour Master of MPL. Drawing on his seafaring days, he shared a core memory of facing a cyclone while serving as a third mate on a bulk carrier.

**Q: Could you share a time when you faced extreme weather at sea?**

**Harbour Master:** “I remember calling at a South Korean port on the east coast. A cyclone was approaching, and the port had to close for three days. We stayed five miles out, underway, waiting for conditions to calm. The wind reached 60–50 knots, and the ship was pitching and pounding heavily. For two days we survived on dry food, as all doors were sealed shut. None of us were allowed on deck, it was too dangerous.”

**Q: What impact did the storm have on the port?**

**Harbour Master:** “When we finally entered, the damage was shocking, I had never seen anything like it. Bulk cargo gantry cranes had been displaced from their trackways, and the trackways themselves were buckled and broken. It took three days before normal cargo operations could resume. I had never seen such destruction with my own eyes until then.”

**Q: What kept your crew safe in those conditions?**

**Harbour Master:** “Discipline and preparedness. Communication with the port via VHF set and constant communication via radio telephone with our shipowners in Singapore. Every loose item onboard was secured, lifeboats lashed, kitchen equipment tied down. Regular checks were made without fail. Those small actions, taken seriously, made all the difference in surviving the storm.”

## Lessons for Today's Mariners

Reflecting on his experience, the Harbour Master highlights the importance of continuous training for mariners at every level, even those in leadership and policy-making roles.

At MPL, pilots and pilot boat drivers go through proper training because every movement demands precision. For pilots, embarking on the pilot ladder in heavy seas is one of the riskiest parts of the job, while for pilot boat drivers, bringing their vessel close alongside a towering ship requires perfect timing and control. It is this coordination that ensures a challenging manoeuvre becomes a controlled and safe operation.

"Pilots should never underestimate the weather," Senior Pilot Ahmed Muaz has always emphasized. "They must always be ready for the worst."

## Preparedness and Responsibility

The role of pilots has never been more crucial. With maritime trade expanding rapidly, and larger container and bulk vessels calling at Malé, the demands on pilotage services and harbour safety continue to grow. Meeting these demands requires not just better infrastructure, but also recognition of the people who put themselves on the line to guide vessels safely in and out of our port. Through investment in training, provision of proper resources, enforcement of international safety conventions such as SOLAS, and the commitment of experienced professionals, MPL continues to safeguard life and cargo at sea. Each ship that arrives or departs safely is a reminder of the teamwork, skills and preparation that keep our ports running, no matter how rough the weather gets.

---



# Fisheries of the Maldives: A SAGA OF SEA & SURVIVAL



Mohamed Isam Abdulla Ibrahim  
Communication Specialist, Marketing & PR  
Maldives Ports Limited

The rhythmic lull of the Indian Ocean has been the drumbeat of Maldivian life since time immemorial. It is a song of sustenance, culture, and identity, echoing the words of former President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom:

*"Fishing is the lifeblood of our nation, it is inborn. From the soil on which we live, to the sea around us, it remains an integral part of our existence. Fishing, and our country and its people, are one and shall remain inseparable forever."*



Photo: Maldives Ports Limited

## In the Heart of the Indian Ocean

The first inhabitants of the Maldives were not merely settlers; they were expert seafarers. This skill was a necessity for navigating the vast stretches of ocean to reach the coral atolls. Their profound knowledge of the sea allowed them to not only survive but also thrive, leading to the development of unique fishing methods and vessels. It's believed they further refined their designs by reverse-engineering shipwrecks, incorporating elements from Arabian dhows and Chinese merchant ships. The result was the iconic dhoni, a vessel perfectly suited to their needs.

The traditional dhoni was a wooden vessel built from floatable wood found on the islands. Old boatbuilding techniques relied on coconut coir rope (made from coconut husk fibers) to lash the planks together. Builders would «sew» the planks by drilling small holes along the edges and stitching them with coir. This method not only avoided metal nails, which could rust in saltwater, but also gave the boat a degree of flexibility, allowing it to handle rough seas without breaking.

The anatomy of a dhoni includes a bow platform (fenfilaa), a front section (dhirunbaa kolhu), and a rear section (kolhufaskolhu). Crucially, the boat features a bait compartment to keep live bait, which is filled with fresh seawater through a knob at the bottom. Steering is managed with a tiller called a hungaanu, and a tool made from a coconut palm spathe, known as a fenfulhafi, is used to splash water to lure fish.

## An Ancient Solution to a Modern Problem

Maldivian dhoni was specifically designed to support the most iconic and historically significant local fishing technique: the pole-and-line method for catching various species of tuna. This practice is incredibly sustainable.

The success of this fishing method relies on the crew's deep knowledge of the sea and the presence of circling seabirds, which often help to locate tuna schools. Once a school is found, fishermen use live baitfish as chum to create a feeding frenzy. They then use barbless hooks on short lines to catch tuna one by one, a technique that minimizes bycatch and protects marine ecosystems. Traditionally, fishing poles of various sizes (kuru dhoshi, medhehi dhoshi, and dhigu dhoshi) were crafted from bamboo or sea hibiscus, while the lines were made from the bark of a milkweed tree.



Photo: Maldives Ports Limited

## The Traders of the Maritime Silk Road

By the 12th century, Maldivian fishers had built a thriving export trade around dried tuna. Known as Maldive fish or hikimas, this prized commodity was a key good on the Maritime Silk Road, reaching markets from Sri Lanka to the Arabian Peninsula and China. The dried fish trade was crucial for the Maldivian economy, establishing the nation as a key player in Indian Ocean trade routes, bringing both wealth and influence. Merchants and sailors regularly stopped at the islands to trade and resupply, sustaining island communities and laying the foundation for the Maldives' enduring reputation as a seafaring nation.

For many Maldivians, fishing is more than a profession; it's a way of life deeply embedded in the island communities. The tradition continues today in some parts of the country, with men returning from a long day at sea and the catch being communally distributed at the harbor. People gather there to get their share, and portions are also given free of charge to households that cannot afford it, a testament to

the strong communal bonds and a tradition of taking care of one another. As boats are beached, markets still spring up, where people conduct business and process the catch. The fish processing and sorting work was traditionally carried out by the skilled island women.

Beyond dried fish, Maldivian fishermen also played a vital role in the lucrative trade of ambergris. While at sea for fishing, they spotted and collected ambergris or "floating gold". They also visited uninhabited islands and sandbanks during their fishing trips, where they collected ambergris that had washed ashore. This highly priced good, used in perfumes and medicine, was a significant export for the Maldives on the Maritime Silk Road.

## Then, Now, and What Lies Ahead

The mid-20th century marked a pivotal moment for Maldivian fisheries with the introduction of mechanization, which transformed centuries-old practices. In 1974, the government began a program to replace sails with engines on traditional fishing boats. This innovation drastically improved efficiency, allowing fishermen to travel farther and faster to reach rich fishing grounds and return to port swiftly with their catch.

Modern fishing vessels have evolved significantly from their predecessors. While the traditional dhoni hull shape remains iconic, today's versions are built with fiberglass and powerful engines. They are equipped with advanced technology like GPS and echo sounders for navigation, as well as VHF radios and satellite phones for communication. A key addition is onboard cold storage, which allows fishermen to preserve their catch and extend their trips further from shore.

The establishment of the Maldives Industrial Fisheries Company (MIFCO) further modernized the industry by creating infrastructure for the collection, freezing, and export of tuna. This effort helped fishing become the nation's second-largest industry after tourism, supporting thousands of livelihoods and establishing the Maldives as a key player in the global tuna market.

Today, the fishing industry faces new challenges. Climate change and rising sea temperatures are contributing to decreasing fish stocks in the Indian Ocean, which poses a significant threat to the nation's primary food source. Compounding this issue is a noticeable decrease in interest among Maldivian youth in joining the fishing industry. As younger generations seek employment in tourism and other modern sectors, the traditional skills and knowledge passed down for centuries are at risk of being lost. Despite these challenges, the nation's commitment to the pole-and-line fishing method remains a point of pride, but the future of this ancient way of life is delicately balanced.



Addu First:

---

# A Practical, High-Return Strategy For National Logistics



Mohamed Aiman Ali  
Manager Business Development, Business Development & Projects  
Maldives Ports Limited

*Addu City, South Province, Maldives  
Photo: Unsplash/Afrah*

The Maldives runs on sea lanes. Every litre of fuel, bag of rice and rebar for housing arrives over a quay wall. In such an economy, ports are not just infrastructure; they are macroeconomic policy. For decades, national logistics has been organised around Malé. That model is out of room and out of redundancy. An Addu-centred plan—beginning with a bulk-cargo facility at Hithadhoo and sequenced toward a fisheries logistics and processing hub—offers something unusually rare in public investment: fast, bankable wins that also unlock a long-horizon growth story for the south and reduce systemic risk for the country.

## The Case for Shifting Focus South

Two facts stand out in the most recent cargo data for Addu. First, volumes are real and lumpy. In 2024, throughput peaked in Q2 at roughly 1,040 TEU-equivalents, then softened in Q3 (30~) and Q4 (170~)). Second, the mix is predictable: motorcycles, vehicles and general cargo dominate, while project inputs (aggregates, cement, steel) arrive in surges. This volatility is precisely what damages small municipal harbours—because heavy cargo is still too often discharged mid-stream or at quays never designed for it—and what keeps landed costs in the south stubbornly high.

Policy has tried to nudge cargo south with duty reliefs. It hasn't worked because the platform itself is wrong. Without a proper bulk berth, controlled stockpiles, and efficient last-mile distribution, shippers face higher risk, higher insurance and higher unit costs. The result is a recurring subsidy burden for the parent company and an avoidable drag on Addu's development.



## Start with what pays back fast: Hithadhoo's Bulk Cargo Handling Facility

The first step is also the simplest: move bulk handling onshore, inside a controlled facility at Hithadhoo.

### **What changes on day one.**

Safe berthing replaces mid-stream discharge. A ramped quay, weighbridge, security fencing and bonded operations align the port with international Port State and Customs standards. Stockpiles are managed professionally. Small community harbours stop taking heavy-lift damage. Most important to builders and households, delivered prices for aggregates and cement come down because the handling chain becomes faster, safer and insurable.

### **What it costs and why it's financeable.**

The engineering is modest by national standards. Phase1-site works (dredging, levelling, lighting, fencing) require about MVR 5.2 million; Phase2- quay and basic equipment add roughly MVR 13 million. A full "workhorse" configuration that includes mobile equipment lifts the total to around MVR 33 million. Revenue lines are straightforward—stevedoring

per tonne, short-haul distribution, marine services per call, and warehousing per tonne-day—and they start immediately. In the base cases modelled, annual cash generation begins in year one; payback ranges from well under a year to under three years, with NPVs and IRRs comfortably above public investment hurdle rates. Few public works can make that claim.

### **What policy must do.**

Three decisions unlock this: (i) approve Phase1- now; (ii) grant HPL exclusivity for bulk cargo within Addu to prevent a race-to-the-bottom on safety and tariffs; and (iii) sunset ad-hoc mid-stream handling once the quay is operational. These are not subsidies; they are housekeeping. They convert a recurrent operational headache into a cash-positive asset that lowers the cost of building in the south.

## Use the Same Works Twice: Open a Niche Yacht/Small-Craft Line

The dredging and basin-calming required for bulk operations also enable a small but profitable service: ISPS-gate access, bonded ship stores, fuel bunkering and cargo drops for yachts and coastal craft. This won't fund the city by itself, but it is a high-margin adjunct that smooths revenue between construction cycles and anchors Addu's reputation as the southern waypoint.

## Build The Long Game: A Seafood Hub that Earns in Hard Currency

Beyond bulk, the Western Indian Ocean tuna fishery is the region's great protein trade. Today, industrial landings and value-added processing cluster at Port Victoria (Seychelles) and Port Louis (Mauritius). The Maldives participates largely through dispersed, smaller-scale processing. A re-tooled Addu can capture a meaningful slice of that value without compromising domestic pole-and-line fisheries.

### *Scale and footprint.*

Depending on the traffic mix (longliners vs. purse seiners), the port requires ~760–280 metres of quay and inner-harbour depths of –8.5 to –11.8 metres. Landside needs are five to six hectares for cannery and cold storage within a -12hectare reclaimed logistics precinct. Four throughput scenarios—conservative longline to ambitious purse-seine—map annual flows from the low hundreds of thousands to just under half a million tonnes. These are not paper targets; they are sized against the actual Western Indian Ocean fleet and historical catch.

### *Capital and sequencing.*

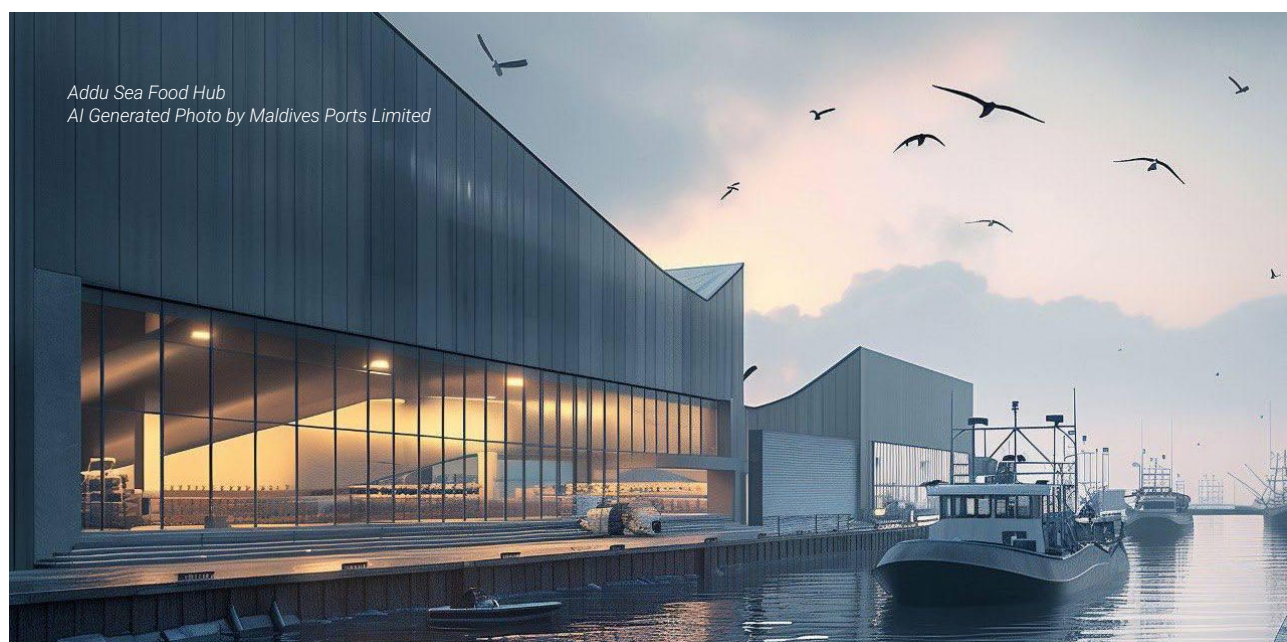
A longline-led hub falls in the USD 86–80 million range; a purse-seine-ready option is USD 135–120 million; designing for future carrier calls pushes toward USD 150 million. The key is to share common works (dredging, reclamation, paving, breakwater) across multiple tenants—bulk now, Ro-Ro/containers later—so fisheries investments aren't saddled with costs that serve the whole port.

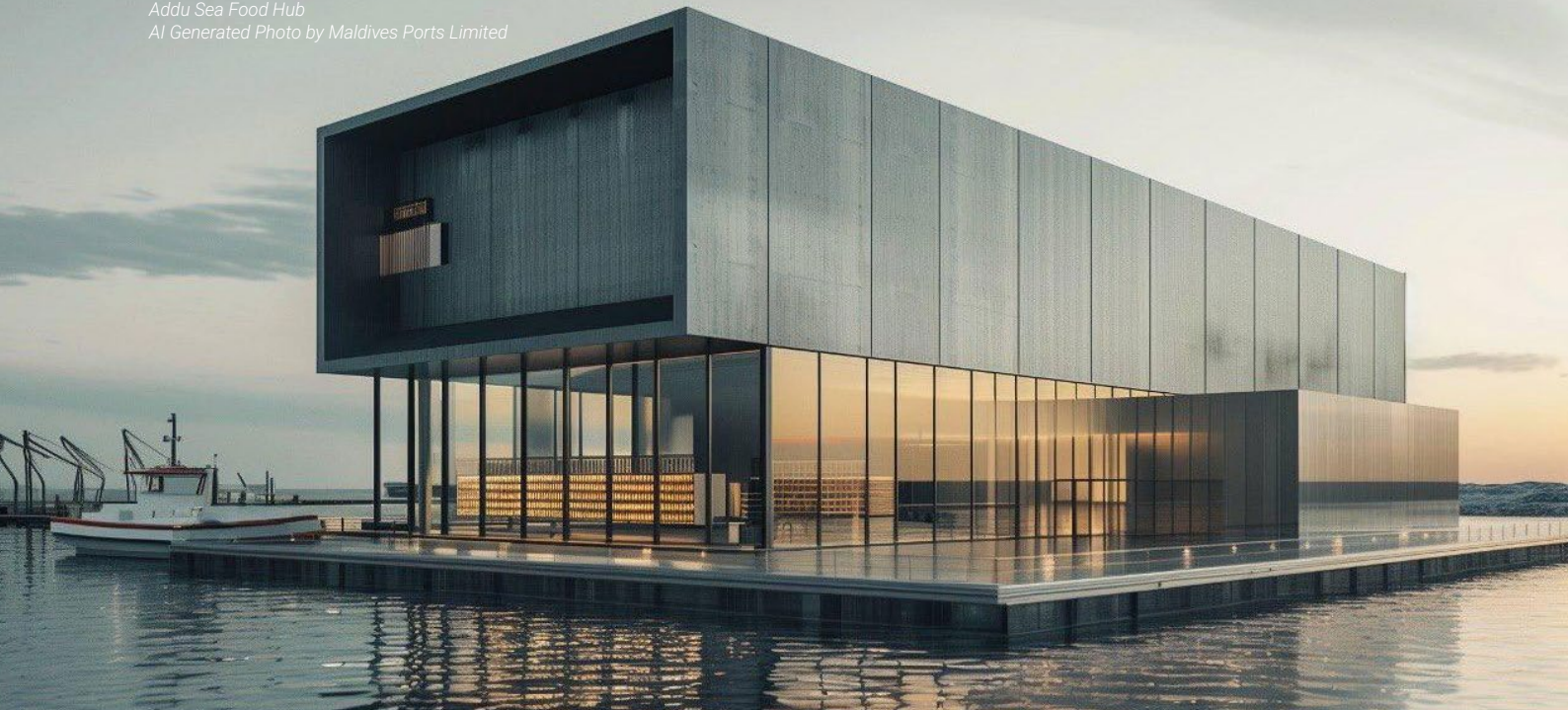
### *Why it matters for the macro picture.*

The national economic case is strong: high positive economic NPV, hard-currency earnings, and a jobs ladder that runs from cold-chain technicians and quality controllers to mechanics, welders and port operators. With greater storage and processing capacity, Maldivian fishers gain price stability and export options. With proper safeguards, the domestic pole-and-line fishery is protected and premium market access—built on traceability and Port State Measures—improves.

### *Be candid about bankability.*

On today's tariff structure, the financial returns for a private concessionaire are thinner than the economic returns for the nation. That is normal for strategic infrastructure. The remedy is orthodox: a PPP on a DBFOM basis under FIDIC-aligned procurement, with (a) a transparent tariff glide-path, (b) CAPEX-sharing for common works, and (c) a tightly conditioned viability-gap grant or revenue-guarantee linked to verifiable outcomes (job creation, export earnings, compliance). Done this way, the state pays only for what the public actually receives.





## A 12 To 18 Month Plan Policymakers Can Own

**Q0-Q1:** Sanction the bulk facility. Release Phase1- funds, issue a short design-build package under FIDIC Yellow Book, and fix an operational go-live date. Announce bulk-handling exclusivity at Hithadhoo and the sunset of mid-stream discharge. The public sees results within months: safer harbours and cheaper inputs for roads and housing.

**Q1-Q2:** “Dredge once, use twice.” Finalise access, turning basin and breakwater geometry for co-use by bulk, future Ro-Ro/containers and a small yacht basin. Publish a Southern Port Order setting fair, predictable tariffs and rules for sharing common works.

**Q2-Q4:** Run a two-track PPP. Issue an EOI for a fisheries logistics hub with two priced options—longline-led and purse-seine-ready, including a “future carrier” variant. Evaluate under a clear PPP law rubric (technical, financial, O&M capability) with MIAC arbitration seat and performance-based payment tests.

**In parallel:** Build the compliance spine. Resource Fisheries, Customs and Port State Measures capacities proportionate to traffic; digitise traceability from quay to container; integrate monitoring, control and surveillance with the concessionaire’s systems. Safeguards are not red tape; they are market access.

## What Addu-Centric Development Delivers

The dividend is tangible and near-term. The bulk facility pays back rapidly, stops the slow destruction of community harbours and lowers the cost of building the south. Dredging and basin-calming pull double duty for yachts and future container/Ro-Ro. The fisheries hub, phased sensibly, brings new hard-currency earnings and a skills pipeline for Addu’s youth—cold-chain, food processing, energy management, port operations—careers that anchor families in the region. Most important, the national logistics map gains resilience: a second serious gateway, less dependence on one city, and a broader base of dollar income.

This is not a bet on hope. It is a sequence of do-able engineering and financing steps, already costed, that convert policy intent into assets the public can see and use. If policymakers want an initiative that will be felt in household budgets in 2025 and still be paying dividends in the 2030s, an Addu-centred plan is the clearest path. Approve the bulk works, publish the southern port order, and launch the PPP. The south will do the rest.



# From Paradise to Port: Expanding the Maldivian Brand Through Cruise Tourism



Aminath Shahudha  
Assistant Administrative Associate, Marketing & PR  
Maldives Ports Limited

The first glimpse of a cruise ship on the horizon is always striking. As dawn breaks over the Malé waterfront, a floating city edges closer, its decks lined with travelers eager for their first look at the Maldives. Some lean over the rails with steaming cups of coffee, others clutch cameras, waiting to capture their first glimpse of the Maldives. It's the postcard moment they've been dreaming of for years, the very image of paradise.

For many of these visitors, arriving here is more than just another stop on an itinerary. It is a moment that gives the fulfilment of a long-held wish, a dream, one that has been whispered about over dinner tables, saved in secret jars, circled on calendar months in advance. The Maldives is a name that conjures paradise itself.

But once the anchor drops and small tender boats begin ferrying passengers ashore, the reality becomes clearer. The Maldives is not equipped with the terminals or berths, as in Colombo or Port Louis, to host the giants of the sea. Every cruise call depends on offshore anchoring and tender rides. This process can be charming in calm seas, and some passengers may enjoy the lagoon transfer as an adventure. But, when conditions are rough, it inevitably slows things down and makes for a frustrating experience. For the modern ships carrying 5,000 - 3,000 guests, tendering can cause bottlenecks, delays or even cancellations, which becomes a logistical hurdle that undermines the appeal of such a trip.

This picture repeated every time captures the larger truth: the Maldives is blessed with a magnetic allure to draw the world's most luxurious cruise liners, but not yet the infrastructure to welcome them properly. This is the dilemma the Maldives faces today, one that could define its cruise future. Certainly, what happens in the next decade will determine the fact whether Maldives becomes a true cruise hub or it continues to be an anchorage state on the fringes of the industry.

## Chartering the Course: Plans for Tomorrow

On the policy side, progress is being made. The government has taken important steps in recent years, including simplifying cruise permits, adjusting port fees, and streamlining regulations. Despite these limitations, the economic footprint of cruise tourism is already significant. According to Official Port Arrival data, the **Maldives received 16 cruise calls at Maldives Ports in 2024, bringing nearly 5,000 passengers in December 2024 alone** which marks as a resilient return of cruise tourism post pandemic. Estimates suggest that a **single ship call can inject between USD250,000 and 600,000** into the economy, to the hands of local guides, shop owners and tour operators.

Recognizing that the country cannot rely on anchorages forever, Maldives Ports Ltd (MPL) is leading plans to develop dedicated cruise terminals across the archipelago.

- **South:** Envisioned as a regional cruise hub
- **Central:** The main international gateway, a flagship terminal
- **North:** Uniquely positioned on the Europe-East Asia route, with potential to become a stopover for repositioning cruises that currently bypass the country.

Since large scale terminals take years to develop, interim solutions such as floating pontoons are under review. At the same time, the government is encouraging public-private partnerships to share investment responsibilities, opening the door for both local and foreign investors to play a role in shaping the nation's cruise future.



AIDA Stella Tourists arriving in Malé  
Photo: Maldives Ports Limited

## Why the Maldives Fits

Geography alone gives the Maldives a natural advantage. Sitting at the heart of the Indian Ocean, the country is a natural midpoint between Europe and Asia. Repositioning cruises, which move fleets seasonally, find in the Maldives a perfect hallway stop, not just a port, but a paradise.

At the same time, global demand trends are moving in the Maldives' favor. The **Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA)** reports that the industry has set a new record in 2024, with **34.6 million** people taking an ocean cruise worldwide. According to CLIA's 2025 "State of the Cruise Industry" report, the global cruise industry is projected to welcome **37.7 million passengers in 2025**, with strong growth in Asia and the Indian Ocean. Post-pandemic travelers are looking for destinations that feel remote, pristine, and exclusive. The Indian Ocean is rising as a new frontier, and the Maldives is ideally placed to catch that wave.

Competition does exist. Sri Lanka, Seychelles, and Mauritius are active players, but the Maldives holds a dual advantage: it can appeal to the mega ships carrying thousands of passengers, as well as to ultra luxury small vessels. One brings scale, while the other brings depth, and together they could diversify our cruise economy.

## The Unique Appeal

What sets the country apart is not just the location, but the experiences that it delivers. Cruise passengers who step onto Maldivian sand are stepping into a dream: turquoise lagoons, coral reefs alive with manta rays and whale sharks, islands scattered like jewels across the oceans. For visitors, the Maldives is rarely "just another stop." Often, it's the highlight of their entire voyage. They can picnic on uninhabited islands or sandbanks one day, snorkel over vibrant reefs the next, and wander through Malé's historic mosques and fish markets the day after. This blend of seclusion and connection, nature and culture, is what makes the country unique on the world's cruise map.

---

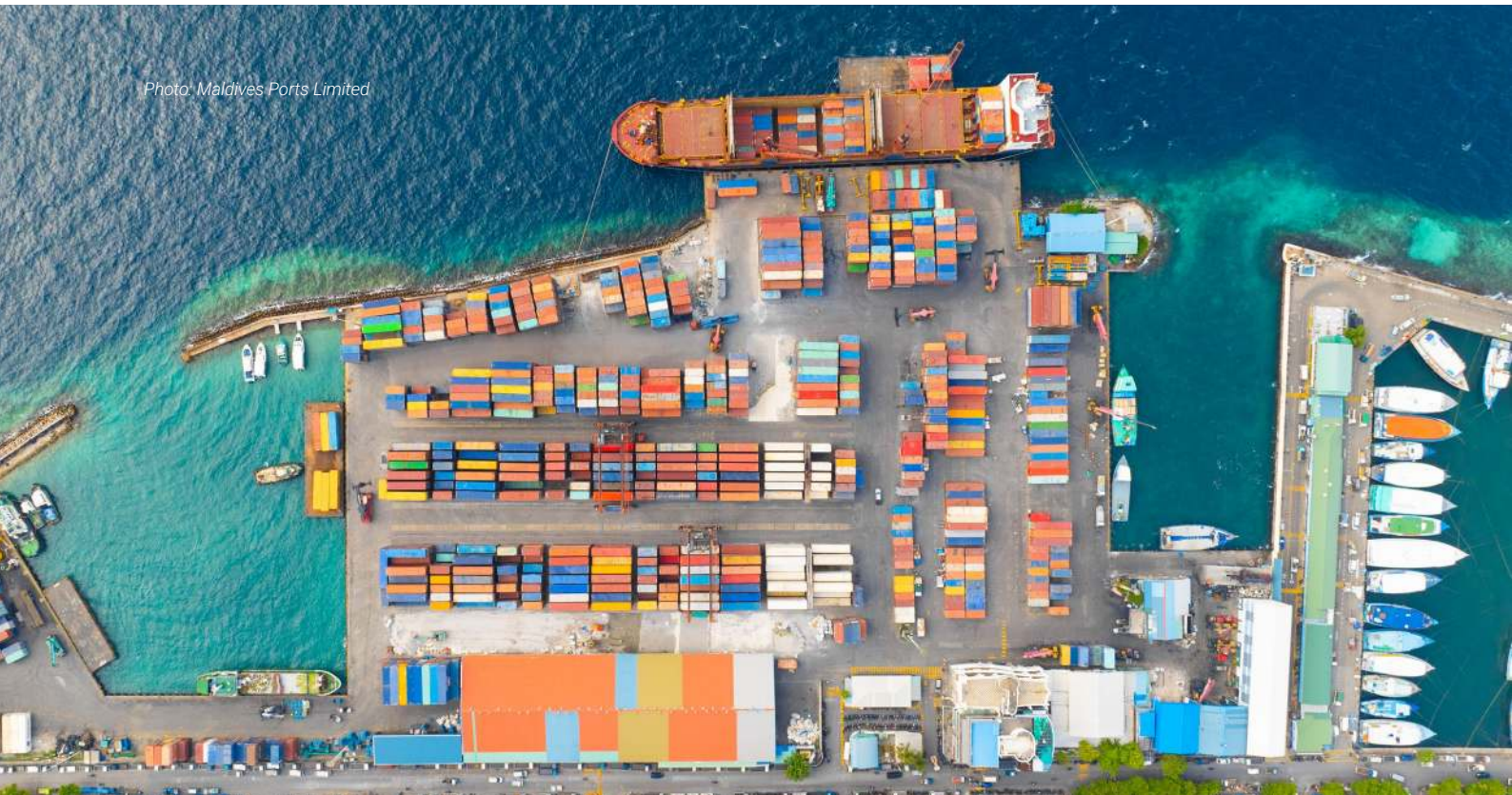
Saafu Point Rd, Fuvahmulah, Maldives  
Photo: Unsplash/Nattu Adnan

# Growth, Efficiency & Development: 39 years of Malé Commercial Harbor



Hassan Shifan  
Deputy Manager, Marketing & PR  
Maldives Ports Limited

*Photo: Maldives Ports Limited*



The Maldives, nestled in the Indian Ocean, occupies a strategic hub for maritime trade routes linking Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Since ancient times, the Maldives has been recognized as one of the most seafaring nations in the Indian Ocean.

As an island nation with limited natural resources, the Maldives is heavily reliant on imports. From basic staple foods to consumer products, construction materials, and fuel, imports are vital to meeting the growing demands. This dependence on imports has made the development and modernization of maritime ports a key factor in the country's economic growth and ensuring the smooth supply of goods across the nation.

## The Development of Malé Commercial Harbor

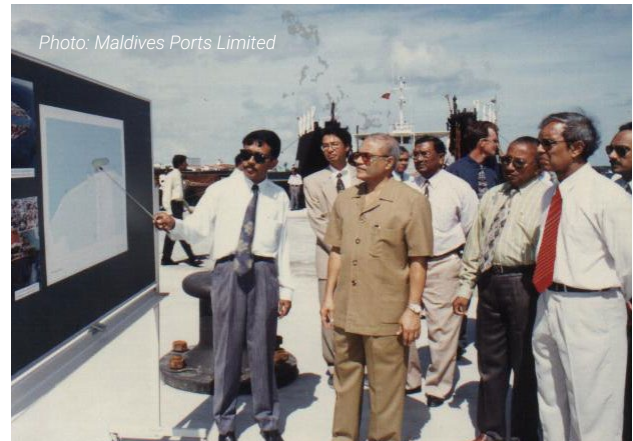
Despite a rich maritime heritage, the development of Malé Commercial Harbor (MCH) did not begin until the mid-1980s. With the introduction of tourism in the early 1970s, a significant rise in exports pushed the government to prioritize the establishment of a modern maritime port. Before the development of MCH, cargo unloading was carried out manually. Goods were typically transferred onto wooden barges—a slow and labor-intensive process. On average, it took about seven days to unload a single cargo vessel, with an annual throughput of only around 70,000 tons.

As imports continued to grow, the Maldivian government recognized the urgent need for a commercial container port to meet rising demand. Construction of the present-day Malé Commercial Harbor began in 1985. Following the completion of the first phase, the harbor was officially inaugurated on 15 September 1986.

“The cost for this project was not easy for the government to bear, but the government deemed this project a necessity,” former President of the Maldives Maumoon Abdul Gayoom said in the inauguration ceremony of MCH in 1986.

“As Maldives is a nation heavily dependent on imports, we needed to find solutions to the inconvenience in handling imports to ensure that our economy will move forward,” Maumoon said, stressing the importance of MCH.

Maldives Ports Authority (MPA) was formed on 1st September 1986, to manage and operate MCH. MPA was corporatized and renamed Maldives Ports Limited (MPL) in July 2008.



The second phase of port development commenced in 1991, financed through a concessional Asian Development Fund (ADF) loan of USD 8.8 million from the Asian Development Bank (ADB). This phase included the construction of a 101-meter concrete wharf enabling vessels to unload directly to shore, procurement of cargo-handling equipment, acquisition of port service craft, and physical works including pier reclamation.

The ADB-funded development project was completed in 1997, significantly improving the efficiency of cargo operations. Before the project began in 1991, cargo throughput stood at 273,000 freight tons. By 1999, following the project's completion, throughput had increased to 590,742 tons and has continued to grow steadily over the past 26 years.



## Challenges Overshadowing the Development of Malé Commercial Harbor

With robust economic growth achieved in the last 20 years, the volume of imports has increased rapidly. MCH has played a key role in the economic development of the past 20 years.

MCH currently handles thousands of containers and over a million freight tons of cargo annually, streamlining the services with new equipment and digital services.

Despite these achievements, MCH faces a critical challenge with the limited space available for cargo operations. Even though imports increase annually, MCH has to cater to the demand with the limited area available.

As cargo volumes rise, port congestion has become a persistent issue, delaying port operations and affecting port efficiency. MCH has managed to maintain high operations standards; however, addressing these constraints has become increasingly important to cater to the demands of the economy.

## Thilafushi Port Development Project: Shaping the Future of Maritime Ports

To address the current constraints in MCH, the Thilafushi Port Project is poised to revolutionize logistics operations in the Maldives and become a key driver of economic growth by 2026.

The government of the Maldives has allocated 60 hectares of land in Thilafushi to MPL to develop an international port in Thilafushi.

The project is planned to be executed in two phases, with the first phase currently nearing completion. In the first phase of development, a 70-meter quay will be developed, and a terminal for unladen containers will be operational soon. Once completed, unladen containers from Malé and Hulhumalé will be relocated to Thilafushi, which will relieve some of the space constraints faced in MCH.

The second phase aims to establish a modern container terminal with advanced port equipment and clearance facilities. Key aspects of the second phase of development include a 375-meter international berth, a container freight station, and a domestic berth.

One of the most significant improvements of the proposed Thilafushi port is the increase in container capacity to 10,000 TEUs, which is set to meet the demand for the next 10 years.



As MPL marks 39 years, the future holds promise of growth and transformation of the Maldives' port industry. With the plans for relocation of the port to Thilafushi, MPL is well positioned to meet the increasing demand of the port for the next decade. MPL is determined to improve port operations and continue to serve as the "economic gateway to the Maldives" and a key partner in the country's economic growth.



Photo: AI generated / Freepik



# Connecting Sea and Sky: Maldives' Journey to a Multimodal Logistics Hub



Saruvaan Hussain Husnee  
Senior Business Development Executive, Marketing & PR  
Maldives Ports Limited

## Introduction

The Maldives has long captivated the world with its sun-drenched beaches, turquoise lagoons, and coral-ringed atolls. Yet behind this idyllic imagery lies a strategic advantage that has remained largely untapped: a geographic location that bridges South Asia's bustling manufacturing hubs with major global trade corridors.

Recognizing this potential, Maldives Ports Limited (MPL) launched its Sea-to-Air Transshipment service in March 2024. The initiative was not merely a new logistics offering but a statement of intent: the Maldives could be more than a tourist destination – it could emerge as a multimodal logistics hub in the Indian Ocean.

Sea-to-Air combines the cost-efficiency of sea transport with the speed of air cargo, providing shippers with resilience, flexibility, and competitive transit times. Goods from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and India are transported by sea to Malé, transferred seamlessly to Velana International Airport (MLE), and uplifted by international carriers to Europe, the Middle East, and beyond. By bridging the gap between ocean and sky, the Maldives offers a route that is faster than traditional sea freight and more economical than direct air shipments from regional hubs.

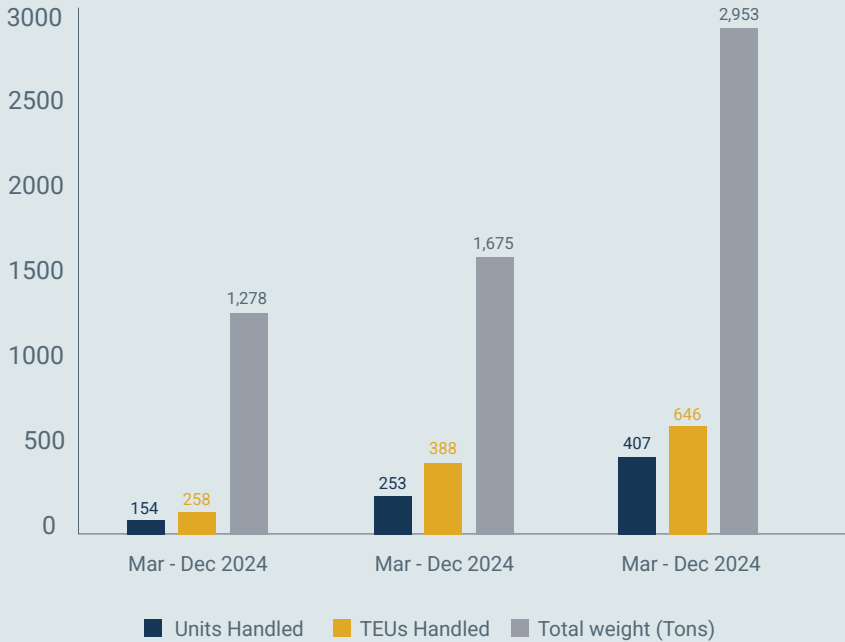
## Early Momentum

The journey of Sea-to-Air began with pioneering airline partners such as Turkish Airlines and Qatar Airways, who recognized the potential of underutilized belly capacity on passenger flights in the Maldives. These early collaborations laid the foundation for expanding the sea-to-air transshipment model in the Maldives. As of mid-2025, the service has grown to include 18 international airlines, connecting to more than 24 major networks via MLE, and has surpassed 2,000 tonnes of sea-to-air transshipment cargo.

“We recognized an opportunity to make use of underutilized belly capacity on passenger flights in the Maldives and turn it into a viable cargo stream. By partnering with MPL and MACL, we could link sea freight with air transport, leveraging their infrastructure alongside our global network. The outcome is a seamless Sea-to-Air model that benefits shippers, generates new revenue for local stakeholders, and positions the Maldives as a strategic logistics gateway.” said **Mr. Bilal Okur – Cargo Director, South Asia, on behalf of Turkish Airlines**



## Sea-to-Air Units & TEUs Handled (Mar 2024 - Aug 2025)



*The graph visually illustrates the rapid adoption and growing confidence among international shippers in the Maldives' Sea-to-Air service.*

This initial phase highlighted several operational insights. Early shipments demonstrated that precise coordination between shipping lines, port operators, and airlines could significantly reduce dwell times and enhance cargo reliability. Feedback from shippers indicated that the service was particularly attractive for goods requiring consistent timing and minimal handling delays, reinforcing the Maldives' credibility as an emerging multimodal hub.

### Strategic Importance for the Maldives

For the Maldives, Sea-to-Air is not only about moving goods – it is about economic transformation. Tourism remains the dominant contributor to GDP, yet reliance on a single sector exposes the country to external shocks such as global travel disruptions or natural hazards. Diversifying into trade and logistics creates new streams of foreign exchange, broadens the economic base, and strengthens resilience.

Geography plays a crucial role. The Maldives lies within striking distance of South Asia's manufacturing centers, offering a route that is quicker than Dubai and more economical than Colombo. Beyond distance, the Sea-to-Air model leverages existing infrastructure and underutilized capacities, demonstrating how strategic planning and operational efficiency can unlock latent potential.

There is a clear consensus among stakeholders that the Maldives' location alone is not enough. Complementary investments in technology, operational coordination, route development, close partnerships, and regulatory alignment are essential to creating a competitive advantage. These factors reinforce the notion that a successful multimodal hub results from both natural endowments and deliberate strategy.

## Strengthening Connectivity

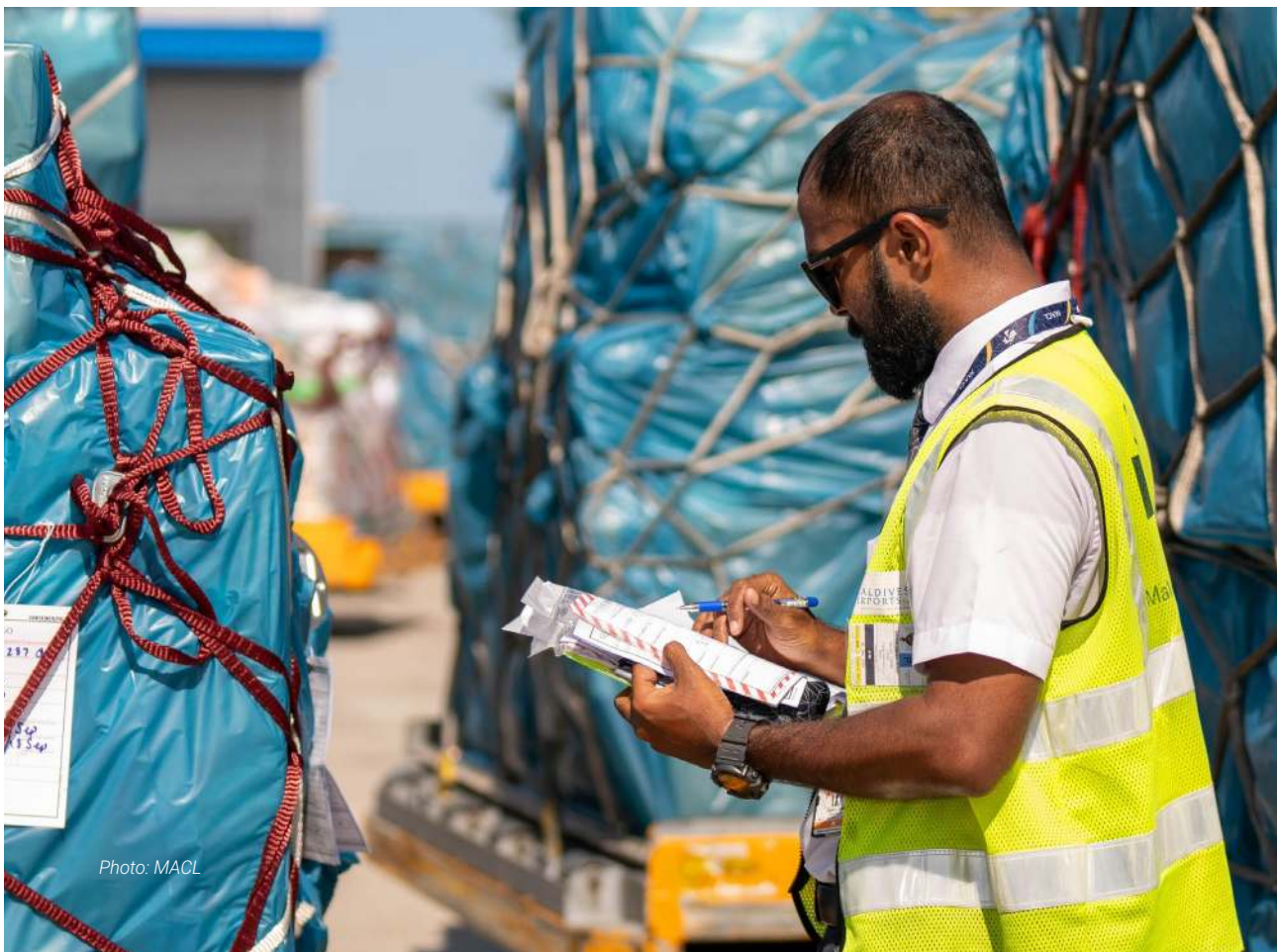
The backbone of the Sea-to-Air initiative lies in collaboration. Maldives State Shipping (MSS) plays a pivotal role in ensuring cargo begins its journey at sea with minimal delay. Units are pre-coordinated and loaded to allow expedited unloading at Malé Port, minimizing dwell time and ensuring smooth transfer to air transport.

“The service helps increase foreign currency by attracting more international cargo movements through the Maldives. It also creates opportunities to invest in developing the Maldives as a regional logistics hub, expanding the economy beyond traditional sectors. For MSS, this gives greater international exposure and attracts global clients. Moreover, the Sea-to-Air service allows us to handle a wider range of cargo, beyond our usual shipments,” said **Mr. Thaha Mohamed, Chief Commercial Officer, Maldives State Shipping.**

Operational efficiencies have been central to this success:

- **Data coordination:** MSS shares shipment details in advance with port and airport operators, enabling pre-planning of storage, screening, and onward transport.
- **Terminal alignment:** Port and airport facilities are synchronized to reduce bottlenecks, ensuring cargo moves rapidly from ship to plane.
- **Stakeholder collaboration:** Regular coordination between MPL, MSS, MACL, and airlines fosters a culture of shared responsibility and operational excellence.

Connectivity in this context is not merely physical; it is also about seamless information flow, synchronized processes, and aligned incentives.



## Infrastructure Investments driving Strategic Growth

Infrastructure is the backbone of any multimodal hub. At Velana International Airport, Maldives Airports Company Limited (MACL) has paired key upgrades with a strategic focus on building a sustainable transshipment model. Recent investments at the cargo terminal, including dedicated handling capacity, advanced screening systems and improved port-airport access, are strengthening MLE's role as a pivotal gateway for regional and global trade.

"We are developing a transshipment model driven by agility, technology and modern infrastructure, complemented by strong partnerships and progressive network planning. By expanding connectivity, enhancing cargo efficiency and fostering collaboration across stakeholders, MLE is evolving into a competitive multimodal hub in the Indian Ocean." said **Mr. Hussain Shafu, Manager, Cargo Development at Maldives Airports Company Limited.**

## Economic and Operational Impact

The Sea-to-Air initiative is already contributing tangible benefits to the Maldives' economy. Beyond cargo volumes, it has helped generate new revenue streams for local stakeholders, including port operators, terminal staff, customs authorities, and logistics service providers.

Several dimensions highlight the broader impact:

- 1. Trade facilitation:** Faster, more reliable transport attracts new business from regional manufacturers seeking alternatives to Colombo or Dubai.
- 2. Skill development:** Operational collaboration has led to knowledge transfer in logistics, cargo handling, and digital coordination among Maldivian staff.
- 3. Private sector engagement:** Airlines, shipping lines, and freight forwarders are increasingly investing in the Maldives' capacity, creating a positive feedback loop of service improvement and market confidence.

Collectively, these effects reinforce the Maldives' position as a credible and sustainable multimodal hub.

The recent inauguration of Terminal 1, the new passenger terminal at Velana International Airport, further enhances operational capabilities by improving connectivity and expanding belly cargo capacity, enabling MLE to better serve its network and reinforce its position as a transshipment hub.

In parallel with infrastructural upgrades and strategic partnerships, we are working towards advancing our digital transformation by planning and implementing initiatives such as EDS machines in the export terminal, automated dimension-checking systems, vacuum lifters, and a robust digital communication platform to ensure seamless coordination among key stakeholders. These planned initiatives are crucial to enabling a transparent, efficient, and reliable sea-to-air process in the Maldives.

Photo: Ai generated / Freepik



## Future Outlook: Diversification and Expansion

The Maldives' long-term ambition extends beyond conventional cargo. MSS is exploring direct feeder services from Bangladesh and India, bypassing Colombo, which could accelerate growth, reduce transit times, and enhance operational reliability. MACL is also expanding opportunities within the sea-to-air model by working closely with airline partners to diversify cargo flows and create pathways for high-value, time-sensitive exports.

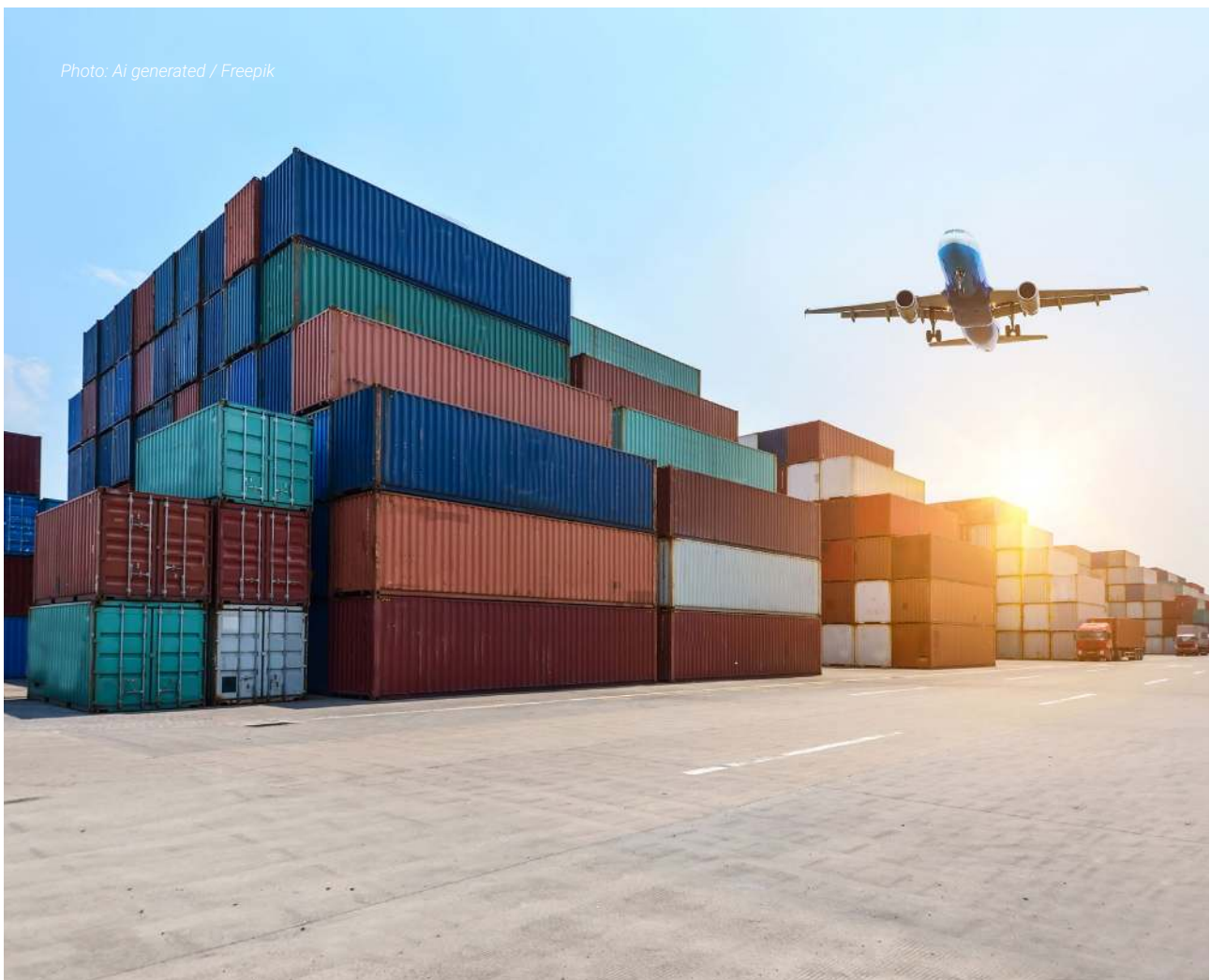
Stakeholders share a unified vision: a fully integrated Sea-to-Air ecosystem that leverages the Maldives' geography, infrastructure, and technology to compete with traditional regional hubs. Continued investments in digital systems, operational coordination, and infrastructure capacity will be pivotal for sustaining long-term growth.

## Redefining the Maldives' Role in Global Trade

In less than two years, the Maldives has transitioned from concept to operational multimodal hub. Partnerships with 9 airlines, multiple feeder routes, and targeted infrastructure investments have positioned the country on the global cargo map.

Sea-to-Air is no longer just about moving conventional cargo; it is about redefining the Maldives' role in global trade. From underutilized belly capacity to a collaborative multimodal corridor, the initiative demonstrates the power of combining geography, infrastructure, operational excellence, and technology.

The Maldives' story is instructive: tourism built the economy of yesterday; trade and logistics can build the economy of tomorrow. By leveraging strategic location, stakeholder collaboration, and operational innovation, the Maldives is proving itself a sustainable, competitive, and forward-looking logistics hub for the Indian Ocean.





# THILAFUSHI VESSEL REPAIR YARD

*Your trusted experts in vessel repair services*

Call : 9339 332 960+ | Email: [docks@port.mv](mailto:docks@port.mv) | [www.port.mv](http://www.port.mv)

Uhandhu

 Maldives  
Ports Limited



[www.port.mv](http://www.port.mv)