

Uihandhu



Abdulla Kamaludeen

The First Managing Director of
Maldives Ports Limited

The National Logistics Plan

Transforming Connectivity, Economic
Stability, and Regional Equity in the Maldives

Unlocking 24-Hour Access at Malé Commercial Harbour



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CEO'S MESSAGE

DCP (Retd) Mohamed Rishwan
Chief Executive Officer

I extend my warmest greetings and best wishes to our valued readers as we step into a new year.

I am pleased to connect with you through this edition of our corporate magazine, which reflects not only our progress as an organization but also the people, partnerships, and values that continue to shape Maldives Ports Limited.

This year holds special significance for MPL. In September, we will proudly celebrate our 40th anniversary—four decades of service to the nation and its economy. This milestone belongs to everyone who has been part of our story: our employees past and present, our stakeholders, and our partners who have walked alongside us.

In this issue, we are honoured to feature a special segment on Mr. Abdulla Kamaludeen, the first Managing Director of Maldives Ports Limited. His leadership and vision during the formative years of the organization laid a strong foundation upon which MPL continues to build. As we reflect on our history, it is important to acknowledge the individuals whose dedication helped shape the institution we are today.

I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation to all contributors—both from within MPL and from other organizations and individuals.

As we approach the holy month of Ramadan, we also enter the busiest operational period of the year for MPL. I commend our teams for their unwavering commitment and assure our stakeholders that Maldives Ports Limited will work tirelessly to ensure smooth, efficient, and uninterrupted port operations.

Maldives Maritime Conference 2026

15th April 2026

The Maldives Maritime Conference brings global maritime leaders together to drive innovation, sustainability, and growth.

Hosted by Maldives Ports Limited (MPL), the 2nd edition strengthens the Maldives' role in the regional maritime landscape.



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Abdulla Kamaludeen: The First Managing Director of Maldives Ports Limited



Ahmed Shifan
Deputy Manager, Marketing and PR
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For the first Managing Director of Maldives Ports Limited, the port is more than a chapter in his professional life. It is a story of beginnings—of responsibility, vision, and nation-building at a time when Malé Commercial Harbour was still evolving and the foundations of a modern maritime port had yet to take shape.

By the time Honourable Abdulla Kamaludeen was appointed as the first Managing Director of the Maldives Ports Authority (later renamed Maldives Ports Limited in 2008), he was already a seasoned figure in the port sector.

Prior to his appointment, Kamaludeen led the Ports Commission and the Public Works Department for nearly a decade. He also played a leading role in the Malé Commercial Harbour development project, making him the ideal candidate to head the newly established Ports Authority.

“I was managing the Ports Commission and the Public Works Division from around 1975, so I was responsible for the development and maintenance of harbors,”

Kamaludeen recalled during an exclusive interview with Ulhandhu magazine.

“I was also given a leading role in the Malé Commercial Harbour development project. By the time I was appointed Managing Director of the Ports Authority, I had extensive experience in the sector.”

Malé Commercial Harbour: Vital Infrastructure for Economic Development

Although the Maldives is a country highly dependent on imports, prior to 1986 it did not have a commercial port. Before the development of Malé Commercial Harbour, cargo handling was a time-consuming and difficult process.

“Back then, cargo was unloaded from the area in front of the Islamic Centre. On days when cargo was unloaded, we had to block the road,”

Kamaludeen said, recalling the labour-intensive nature of operations at the time.

“Ships would anchor near Dhoonidhoo, and cargo would be unloaded onto barges and transported back to Malé. On some occasions, cargo vessels had to remain for nearly 40 days to complete unloading. It was both a time-consuming and costly operation.”

As the tourism industry began to develop and the burden of cargo handling increased, the government made the decision to develop Malé Commercial Harbour in 1985. The development of Malé Commercial Harbour was financed through a commercial loan from the Bank of Ceylon and was completed in September 1985. Kamaludeen was one of the leading figures in the Malé Commercial Harbour development project.



“The first step was to build the infrastructure for a commercial port. The government acquired a loan from the Bank of Ceylon and developed the port along with the vehicles required for initial operations,” he said.

The Maldives Ports Authority (MPA) was formed in 1986 and was given ownership of the port infrastructure. However, MPA did not initially handle port operations, which were instead conducted by Maldives Transport and Contracting Company (MTCC).

“MPA rented Malé Commercial Harbour to MTCC, along with the vehicles. MTCC conducted the operations at first. But after some time, MTCC informed the government that it was not financially feasible for them to continue operations while paying rent to MPA,” Kamaludeen explained.

“At the same time, MPA had to repay the loan taken to develop the port and therefore required revenue from rent. The government later handed over port operations to MPA in 1988.”



MPA was officially given responsibility for port operations on 5 January 1988. Kamaludeen was initially appointed as Managing Director on an interim basis and was subsequently confirmed as Managing Director on the same date.

Kamaludeen later played an active role in the second and third phases of the Malé Commercial Harbour development project before stepping away from the port sector.

“I was part of the delegation that went to the Asian Development Bank alongside Mohamed Shibab and Ali Abdulla (a former Managing Director of MPA), to secure the loan for the third phase,” he said.

Vision for Sustainable and Decentralised Port Development

Over the past 39 years, Maldives Ports Limited has made significant progress in port operations. However, with rapid economic growth and an increasing volume of imports, limitations in port capacity have become a major challenge. Kamaludeen praised the efforts of MPL in maintaining the port and acknowledged the strides made over the years.

“I don’t think MPL will face the challenges that we experienced prior to the development of Malé Commercial Harbour,” he said.

Positioning the Maldives at the crossroads of international maritime trade routes, Kamaludeen highlighted the country’s potential to develop the maritime sector into a major industry. However, he stressed that proper planning and effective engagement of regional ports are essential to ensure long-term sustainability in port operations.

“Regional ports have been developed in both the north and the south. The original plan was to develop these ports and accommodate direct vessel arrivals to regional locations to ensure regional distribution. But due to the lack of proper policies and planning, it never materialised.”

“To truly improve the port industry, we need to decentralise port operations. Regional ports should be utilised.”

Kamaludeen stated that it was never the government’s intention to retain port operations within Malé City over the long term. In addition, he stated that even if the main commercial port is relocated, the development and utilisation of regional ports remain essential for long-term sustainability.

“Even if the port is relocated, regional ports are still necessary for sustainable port operations,” he said.

“Decentralisation is key. Without proper use of regional ports, congestion will eventually return.”

He stressed that relocation alone is not a permanent solution to congestion and operational inefficiencies. According to Kamaludeen, proper planning for future growth is critical to maintaining efficiency in port operations.



“If the port is relocated to Thilafushi, but operations remain focused solely on Malé without proper long-term planning, that port will also become congested after a few years, This is why planning for the future is extremely important.”

Kamaludeen was appointed as the Chief Executive Officer of the Maumoon Foundation recently. Reflecting on his life after retirement from active service, Kamaludeen shared that he continues to remain engaged in work.

“Right now, I am working with the Maumoon Foundation on the refurbishment and maintenance of the Islamic Centre . I also undertake consultancy work whenever possible. I try to remain active.”

Though no longer directly involved in port operations, Kamaludeen’s legacy remains deeply embedded in the foundations of Maldives’ maritime infrastructure. From overseeing the earliest stages of Malé Commercial Harbour to guiding the institutional development of the Maldives Ports Authority, his contributions helped shape the modern port system that continues to support the nation’s economic growth.

As Maldives Ports Limited heads towards celebrating four decades of services this year the experiences and insights of its first Managing Director serve as a reminder that development is built not only on infrastructure, but on vision, planning, and leadership grounded in national interest.

AUTHOR

Hassan Shifan is currently working as the Deputy Manager of Marketing and Public Relations at Maldives Ports Limited. Before joining Maldives Ports Limited, he spent several years working in the media field.

His background in media helped him to build strong communication skills and understanding of public relations and corporate communications. At Maldives Ports Limited, he is involved in handling media communications, public relations and corporate communication, supporting the organization’s image and outreach.

With experience in both media and corporate sectors, he brings practical knowledge to his work. He has a keen interest in media communications and content creation.



Strategic Focus For 2026:

Advancing MPL Through Efficiency, Expansion, Service Leadership, and Financial Discipline



Asadh Hammad
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Photo: Maldives Ports Limited

As Maldives Ports Limited (MPL) moves into 2026, our strategic direction is centered on becoming a safer, more efficient, and more resilient organization, one that supports the country's economic ambitions while meeting the expectations of our customers, stakeholders, and communities. The year ahead will be defined by four major areas of focus: driving operational efficiency through good governance, relieving congestion to unlock capacity, strengthening national logistics through enhanced public service obligations, and upholding disciplined financial management. Together, these priorities position MPL to build a modern, future-ready port ecosystem for the Maldives.



Efficiency Anchored in Safety, Security, and Good Governance

Our first strategic pillar emphasises efficiency built on safety, security, and enterprise risk management, all underpinned by good governance. The port environment is operationally intense, with thousands of container moves, truck flows, and yard activities taking place every day. To deliver reliable and competitive services, MPL will drive measurable improvements in several key indicators, including crane moves per hour, berth productivity, truck and yard turn-times, and cargo dwell time. These metrics reflect the heartbeat of port operations and directly affect shipping lines, logistics partners, and the national supply chain.

Achieving these improvements requires a structured approach founded on clear performance standards, transparent reporting, and defined accountability. In 2026, all operational teams will work with aligned, data-driven targets that enable real-time monitoring and management oversight. Governance will play a central role in how efficiency improvements are planned and executed. MPL will prioritize investment in critical port machinery and equipment based on risk-based planning, ensuring that decisions are not only operationally justified but also supported by documented business cases and auditable procureme processes.

Additionally, asset-management controls will be strengthened so that the lifecycle of every piece of equipment, from marine fleet to container-handling machinery, is monitored with discipline. This will help maximize uptime and mechanical availability, reducing breakdowns, and unplanned disruptions. Operational discipline will be further supported by preventive maintenance programs, optimized vehicle dispatching, and continuous Key Performance Indicator (KPI) monitoring. These initiatives aim to reduce idling of equipment and vehicles, limiting fuel consumption and environmental impact while ensuring that efficiency gains do not come at the cost of safety, security, compliance, or stakeholder confidence. Ultimately, this governance-based approach will reinforce MPL's credibility as a well-managed and accountable organization.

Decongest to Grow: Unlocking Capacity for the Future

The second major strategic priority for 2026 is “Decongest to Grow,” a principle that recognizes the need to expand capacity by first addressing the constraints of existing facilities. As cargo volumes grow and demand for space increases, Malé Commercial Harbour (MCH) and the Hulhumalé Terminal have reached a stage where congestion directly affects service levels. To relieve this pressure, MPL will commission the Thilafushi Empty-Container Depot and the Thilafushi Cargo Handling Facility. This step alone will make a significant difference, as moving empty containers off prime operational land will free up space for more efficient cargo movement and storage at MCH and Hulhumalé.

However, the long-term transformation will come with the completion of the Thilafushi Container Handling Facility and the Domestic Harbour Relief Project. These major infrastructure developments are expected to nearly double current storage capacity while supporting a targeted vessel turnaround time of approximately 48 hours. Fast turnaround not only benefits shipping lines but also enhances the predictability of the entire logistics chain. Furthermore, the relocation of domestic harbour operations from Malé and Hulhumalé to the Thilafushi Domestic Quay will unlock valuable land in the urban core while streamlining domestic cargo handling in one central, purpose-built location. These decongestion initiatives will form the backbone of MPL’s long-term growth strategy and increase the overall efficiency of the national port network.

Leading Public Service Obligations Through a National Logistics Network

The third strategic focus highlights MPL’s role in leading public service obligations across the country. Ports are not just commercial enterprises; they also serve as critical national infrastructure that ensures communities across all regions have access to the goods and supplies they need. MPL recognizes existing gaps in the interface between port operations and public service delivery. In 2026, MPL will strengthen its leadership role by developing a comprehensive national logistics network.

This network will identify captive cargo demand, channel volumes through regional hubs, and support distribution clusters that enable smoother, more predictable flows of goods. The initial operating model will deploy scheduled container services, ensuring that vessel movements are reliable and coordinated across the country. To complete the final leg of delivery, short-sea shipping will be used to reach regional ports, providing a more structured, efficient alternative to ad-hoc transport arrangements.

By creating a reliable and scalable platform for nationwide cargo movement, MPL aims to enhance supply chain resilience, reduce logistical bottlenecks, and improve service accessibility for island communities. This approach strengthens national connectivity and supports economic activity beyond the central region, aligning closely with national development priorities.



Photo: Maldives Ports Limited
Malé Commercial Harbour



Photo: Maldives Ports Limited

Disciplined Finance for Sustainable Growth

The final strategic pillar for 2026 is disciplined financial management. As MPL undertakes operational reforms and significant infrastructure expansion, maintaining financial health is critical to long-term sustainability. In the year ahead, the company will prioritize restoring operating margins, stabilizing cash flows, and phasing capital expenditure in line with realistic growth and revenue expectations.

A key component of this financial discipline is ensuring that financing instruments are appropriately matched with asset types. Term debt will be reserved for long-life, revenue-generating assets where returns can be measured and aligned with repayment terms. Public-private partnerships (PPP), joint ventures (JV), and build-operate-transfer (BOT) models will be explored to bring in private-sector expertise and capital, especially in areas where shared operational responsibilities or landlord port models can improve efficiency. These collaborative arrangements will reduce financial exposure while accelerating infrastructure development.

For resilience and green investment components, MPL will actively pursue concessional financing and grant funding. With ports playing a crucial role in environmental management and climate adaptation, international financing windows offer opportunities to upgrade port infrastructure in ways that support long-term sustainability goals. Ensuring the right mix of financing instruments across asset categories will allow MPL to grow responsibly while safeguarding its financial position.

Conclusion

MPL's Strategic Focus for 2026 sets a clear direction for a stronger, more efficient, and more resilient port system. By prioritizing good governance, relieving congestion, strengthening national logistics, and ensuring financial discipline, MPL is preparing the organization to meet emerging challenges while creating lasting value for the Maldives. The year ahead will be one of the transformations, guided by strategic clarity, operational excellence, and a strong commitment to national development.

AUTHOR

Asadh Hammad is a Business Analyst at Maldives Ports Limited (MPL), where he focuses on data driven decision making, process optimization, and operational efficiency within the maritime and logistics sector. He holds a Master's Degree in Accounting and Finance from the University of the West in England, which supports his analytical approach to strategic and operational initiatives. He has worked on multiple strategic initiatives, including feasibility assessments and service improvement projects that support organizational growth. Asadh is committed to leveraging analytical frameworks to enhance port operations and drive informed decision making.



Shipping & Seafaring Industry of the Maldives



Dr Azmath Jaleel
Governing Board Member
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Introduction

As an archipelagic nation isolated in the vast Indian Ocean, the Maldives has always shared an intrinsic bond with the sea. Maldivians rely on it for sustenance, transport, and travel, making them natural seafarers. With no land links and few natural resources beyond the ocean, boats were essential for trade with nearby countries like Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and India. Until the mid-20th century, sailboats plied these routes, harnessing the North-Easterly and South-Westerly monsoons to complete their voyages. Even in these early days, the strategic and commercial importance of shipping to the nation was unmistakable.

This article provides a broad overview of trends in the Maldivian maritime industry. Because the topic is vast and wide-ranging, focus will be put only on specific sectors and on international shipping.

Shipping, ports and seafaring

The advent of motor vessels was a milestone in the development of the shipping industry in the Maldives. Maldives Shipping Limited (MSL), under various guises, was the pioneer in building up a shipping fleet under the Maldivian flag. The initiative was from a partnership between the late President Ibrahim Nasir and entrepreneur the late Hon. Koli Ali Umar Maniku, in 1967. In its hey days the company had many vessels with its headquarters in Malé and representative offices in Sri Lanka, India and Singapore. It's mostly tramping operations spanned from the Middle East to Far East. Though many of these ships were more than 25 years old, often rust buckets when acquired, the hardworking Maldivian crew kept them running and in great shape. The welders kept continuously cropping rusted and wasted decks, bulkheads and crane mounts and applying doublers while the deck serang and his crew kept on chipping and painting. A never ending routine. The engine crew, using 'Devcon,'liquid metal, ensured that the cracked cylinder heads kept functioning till the next port of call. In fact, the conduct and aptitude of the Maldivian seafarers were so high, other foreign companies highly sought their recruitment. The burgeoning number of crew recruiting companies from the 1980s till about mid 1990s was a sure testament to that.

MSL's days were not all smooth sailing though and faced stormy waters along the way. There came a period within MSL's lifespan when it was speculated that it was associated with unfulfilled insurance claims, when the company was split to several single ship owning companies to prevent vessels from being detained or impounded at foreign ports. In the late 1980's the Maldivian ship register had close to 90 foreign going vessels, most of which belonged to MSL. While there were many other smaller ship owners, three other significant ones were Villa Shipping, Maldives Industrial Fisheries Company (MIFCO) and Lily Shipping. Today the fleet has been reduced to less than half (Table 1) and thus the number of shipping companies declined as well (Table 2).

Though box shipping was introduced in the 1950's, it started gaining traction from the mid 70's. Containerisation had become a norm by the late 80's and even Maldives' neighbour, Sri Lanka, which was behind the Maldives in the industry had acquired container vessels. MSL did not follow the trend. This was a turning point in MSL and the Maldives' shipping industry, which saw a gradual decline of MSL's

fleet till it was finally disbanded. Today the Maldives State Shipping (MSS), established in February 2020, has taken up the mantle. Their fleet contained (in 2023) four vessels totalling 35190 GT. One of the vessels is 14 years old, another two, 23 years each and the last one 28 years' old .

TABLE 1. MALDIVES FOREIGN-GOING VESSEL REGISTER (2023)

1	9023B	MSS.CHROME	190	26870
2	8778B	MV MSS GALENA	136.72	7406
3	9121B	MSS GRAPHENE	142.69	7406
4	4694B	BOC-1	102.2	3120
5	7848A	MV BONTHI	86.3	2719
6	8395B	MV. JAZEERA REEFER	97.97	2481
7	4678B	BAROASAA 102	83.89	1876
8	5718A	MT.BARUJORA	73.57	978
9	5716A	M.T. GURAAABU	72.66	952
10	6308A	M.V KALAMINJA 402	66.1	932
11	6306A	M.V KALAMINJA403	66.1	932
12	6307A	MAHAA KALAMINJA	66.1	932
13	7338A	MT HAWKS MURAKA	59.03	687
14	7611A	OIVAALI-103	51.3	633
15	8406A	OIVAALI-106	65.46	499
16	8408A	OIVAALI-107	62.25	499
17	8407A	OIVAALI-108	66.36	499
18	1349B	ASIAN DUCHESS	64.39	498
19	8505A	KOAMAS	64.58	497
20	4468B	MT.HAWKS AKIRI	64.42	486
21	5457A	BAROASA 102	50	425
22	6329A	OIVAALI-102	49.19	409
23	6330A	OIVAALI-101	49.19	409
24	9029A	HEAVY STAR9	37.5	400
25	9028A	HEAVY STAR7	35	350
26	5794A	MT.ASIAN DUKE	47.5	336
27	4197A	MT.HIBARU	46.2	327
28	5053A	MT.VILA VIYU	46.6	305
29	4994A	BAROASA 103	50.04	299.88
30	7826B	LEO GENIUS	40.42	269
31	8272A	VILLA UFULI	46.4	266.48
32	9579B	TANGO 10	26.69	252
33	4857B	TANGO 7	23.5	139
34	4922B	TANGO 8	23.5	139
35	8410A	MV.THoori	45	128
36	3147A	VEERU	23.75	121
37	9355A	TANGO6	23.17	113.87
38	2395B	BMC T-001	17.97	93
39	9524B	NORA	73.15	1894
40	9548B	DHOSHA	73.15	1820
41	9602B	LEO INFINITY	67.3	1443
42	4553B	REYVA	70.12	1438
43	7755A	KURIMAGU7	67.3	1376
44	4861B	HUVAN	70.12	1282
45	4921B	KETHI	70.12	1282
46	2396B	BMC B 002	61.45	1229

Source: MTCA

Note: Though still included in the Register, the vessels highlighted in peach colour may have been lost.

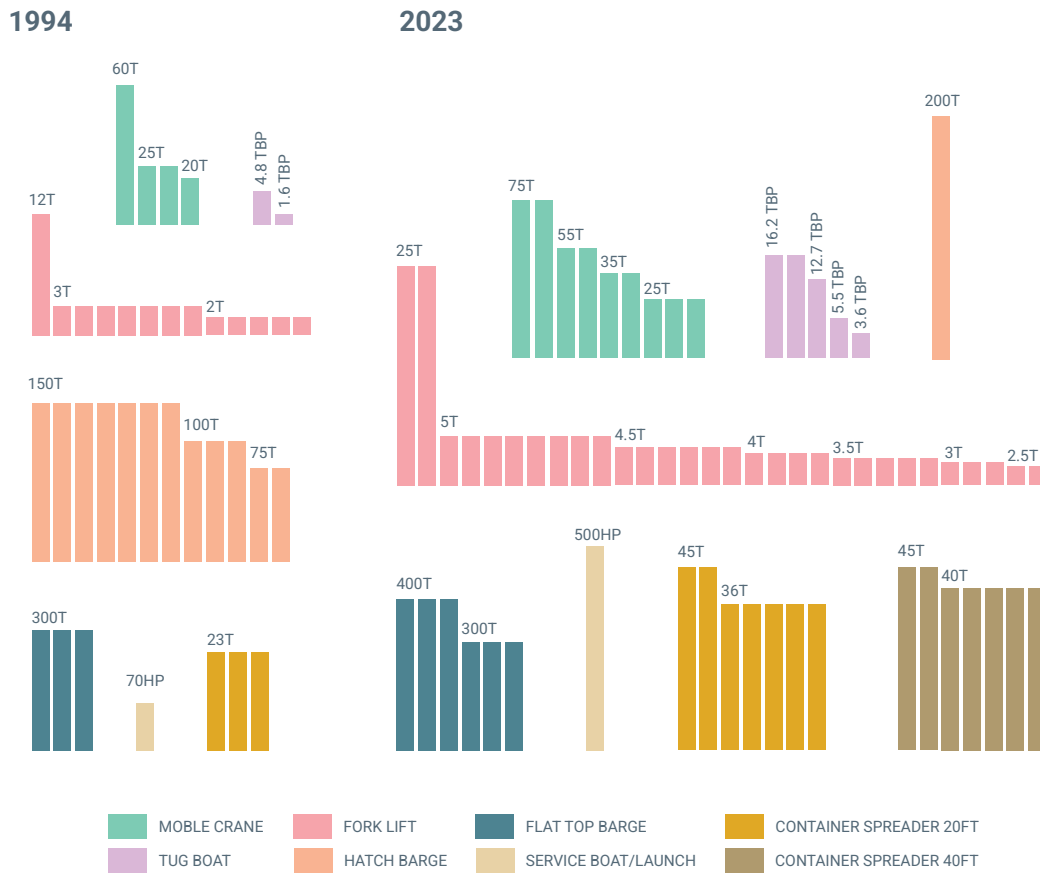
TABLE 2. SHIPPING COMPANIES

ARU ENTERPRISES	
CHAMAN ENTERPRISES	
DHARUMA SHIPPING	
HAPPY MARKET	
LILY SHIPPING	
MADIHAA	
MALDIVES INDUSTRIAL FISHERIES CO. LTD	MALDIVES INDUSTRIAL FISHERIES CO. LTD
MALDIVES NATIONAL SHIP MANAGEMENT LTD	
MARINE EXPORT	
METRANA	
NALAFIYAA	
NAZAKI SERVICES	
OMADHOO SHIPPING COMPANY PTE LTD	
RELIABLE	
SISTA	
STATE TRADING ORGANISATION	STATE TRADING ORGANISATION
VILLA SHIPPING	
WORLD TRADE SHIPPING	
	LEO TRADING PVT. LTD
	MID SEA SHIPPING LINE COMPANY PVT
	MALDIVES TRANSPORT AND CONTRACTING COMPANY PLC (MTCC)
	MALDIVES STATE SHIPPING PVT. LTD (MSS)
	THE HAWKS PVT. LTD

Source: MTCA

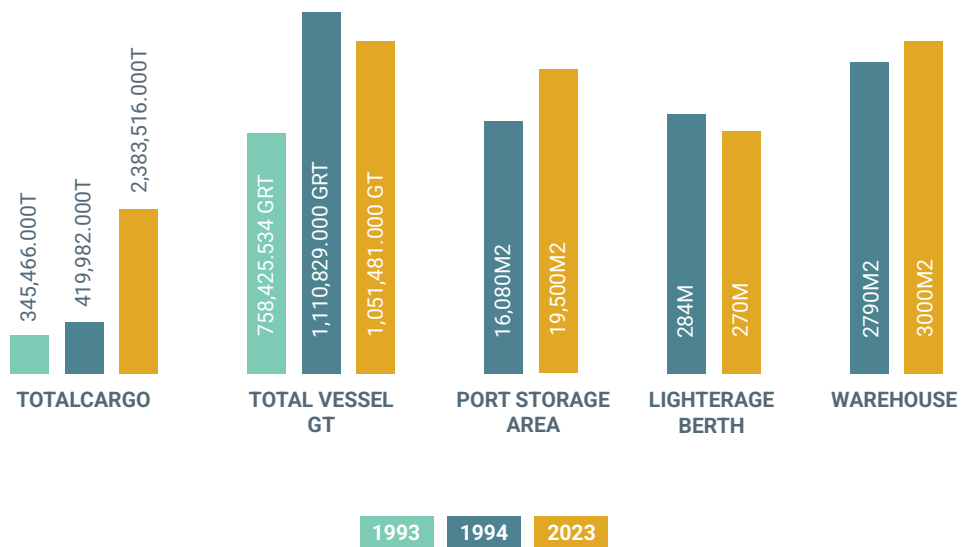
The Maldives' Ports Limited (MPL) (previously MPA) appears to have fared better than shipping. Statistically It has shown progress (See Figs 1 and 2). Whether the rate of development is optimal, based upon prevailing economic environments, and the monopoly it enjoys, or whether the efficiency at which the ports operate is acceptable, are questions to be debated. The lack of foresight on the Malé port quay wall is also another contentious issue. Yet, to the onlooker, even with the numerous political appointees under each successive government, and the consequential heavy financial burden imposed, along with administrative issues they may create, the Maldives Ports Limited seems to be above water. It is also a heartening fact, and worthy of noting, that MPL is investing in education and training.

FIG 1. MPL STATISTICS: PORT EQUIPMENT



Source: MPA (1994) and MPL (2023)

FIG 2. MPL STATISTICS: CARGO, VESSELS, STORAGE AND BERTH

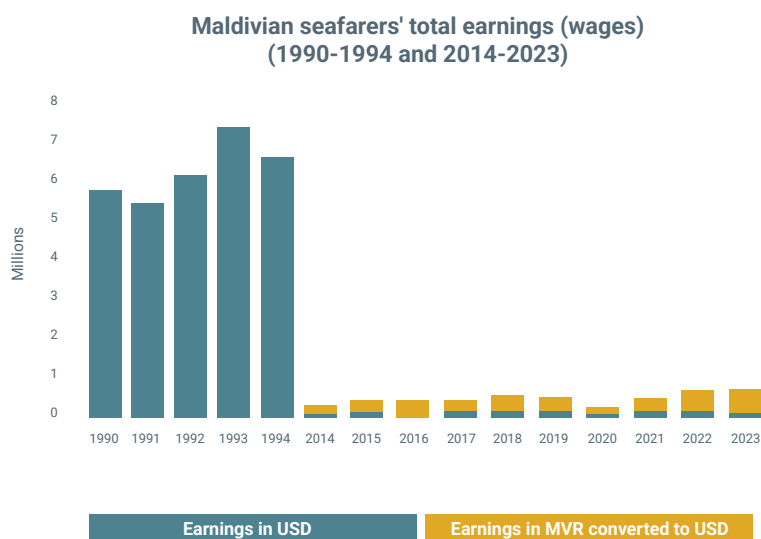


Source: MPA (1993,1994) and MPL (2023)

Seafarers have commanded relatively high wages, and also proved to be a significant means of obtaining foreign currency. Numerous families in different parts of country owe increased standards of living to seafaring. Some islands like H DH Kulhudhuffushi, which had fielded many seafarers, saw their island develop faster and to a higher standard than others nearby. There is evident correlation between seafaring and development. As word of Maldivian seafarers and their admirable qualities in maintaining ships in tip-top condition spread in global shipping circles, the

demand for them increased. Consequently, the number of crew recruiting companies also increased. By the mid90-'s there were at least 10 companies and in 1993, more than a thousand seafarers were signed on to vessels. A survey carried out by the author showed that that Maldivian crew earned around USD10 million or more annually around this period. This assumption is based upon extrapolation of actual figures (Fig 3) given by organisations that provided the information against those that did not.

FIG 2. MPL STATISTICS: CARGO, VESSELS, STORAGE AND BERTH



Source: Author's primary research (1990 – 1994), MOTC (2014-2023)
* MVR to USD conversion at official rate

By 2023, the number of crew recruiting companies had declined to just two, with only Asia Management still playing a significant role today (Table 3). The reasons maybe many-fold.

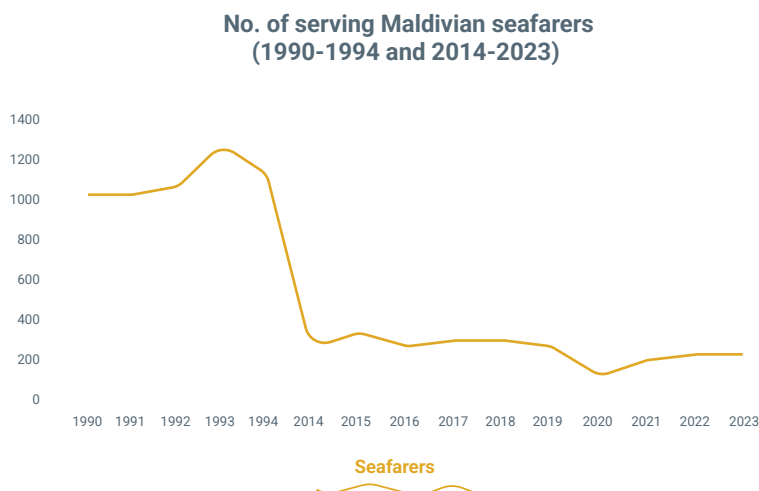
TABLE 3. CREW RECRUITING COMPANIES

ALPHA + MIKE SERVICES	
ANCHOR	
ASIA MANAGEMENT	ASIA MANAGEMENT
EURASIA	
FAALSA OVERSEAS	
GOODFAITH SHIPPING COMPANY	
HAZASH	
MAHIR ENTERPRISES PTE LTD	
MVK MALDIVES PTE LTD	
THE GOODWILL PTE LTD	
SANCO MALDIVES	SANCO MALDIVES

Source: MTCA

While there was a pool of more than 700 seafarers in 1994, the number has come down to about 200 or less today (Fig 4).

FIG 4. SERVING MALDIVIAN SEAFARERS



Source: Author's primary research (1990 – 1994), MOTC (2014-2023)

The decline of MSL could be a contributing factor, but more importantly, stricter IMO regulations that came about with respect to competency meant that foreign employers became stricter in their crew recruitment. Maldives was not able to implement these required standards quickly enough. Most existing ratings not having the minimum literary standards required, did not help either. Additionally,

not enough was done to try and recruit school leavers. Current demand is for officers only, or a whole complement of crew – officers and ratings – of the same nationality. This is primarily to overcome cultural and communication barriers. Maldives, unfortunately do not field many officers and therefore were unable to provide a whole complement of crew.

The Maritime Administration

The Ministry of Transport, under varying names, has almost always been the guardian of the shipping and seafaring industry in the Maldives. The maritime section of the Ministry functions as the national Maritime Administration. Its mandate, among others, includes vessel registration, surveys, certification and licensing of boat drivers, setting standards for education and training, examination and certification of seafarers and port state control. In this regard it is imperative that the Maritime Authority has competent people to undertake these tasks. Especially so with respect to carrying out foreign going ship surveys, setting and ensuring standards of maritime education, training and certification of seafarers and to carry out PSC inspections. This is crucial for ensuring safety and security of the people, vessels, cargo and infrastructure and to ensure protection of the marine environment. True, the Authority can delegate these functions to competent parties, but it must have the in-house capacity to verify that these functions are executed in accordance with relevant International conventions and

national laws and regulations and to stipulated standards. In this respect the Administration needs to have a bare minimum, of qualified persons, ideally experienced seafarers. According to the author's understanding, apart from two political appointees in the Ministry, the Maritime Administration (maritime section) itself, currently does not have anyone who has served in the maritime industry let alone an ex seafaring officer. It is the author's professional opinion that with its multifaceted international obligations with respect to shipping and seafaring, the Authority is hugely lacking in this capacity and would not be able to execute its duties diligently. There are others in the industry voicing similar concerns. According to a recent news article in 'Mihaaru' News (06 November 2025), the most senior naval architect in the Maldives, Ahmed Wajeeh and Captain Shareef (Sanco), a seasoned ex seafarer, have expressed their grave concerns regarding vessel safety. The shortfall in the maritime administration in this regard was highlighted and questioned by both.



Education and Training

To ensure employability as officers and crew of 'Safety of Life at Sea' (SOLAS) class vessels, officers and ratings need to be educated and trained in accordance with relevant IMO conventions, especially the STCW '78 Convention as amended. Maldives began formal maritime education and training in the late 1980's. With a couple of classrooms and a workshop the project started at a basic level addressing the basic courses in personal survival, elementary first aid and basic firefighting. Basic introduction to navigation and engineering was also given. The conditions to carry out even these basic courses effectively, were not adequately met. Later on Global Maritime Distress System (GMDSS) and Automatic Radar Plotting Aid (ARPA) were also introduced. In addition, a coast navigation (Niyami) course was also introduced. In 1999, the training centre was transferred under the umbrella of the Maldives College of Higher Education (MCHE) and renamed the Centre for Maritime Studies (CMS). More than a decade later when the Maldives National University (MNU) was established, the Centre was brought under its wing. Today the Centre has a Dean and a few lecturers comprising of ex seafarers. Currently it

conducts IMO modular courses within its diverse training programmes. Some are also targeted for port personnel. However, most of these are to support or update existing seafarers, rather than to turn out young recruits as seafaring officers, especially to higher ranks. It is encouraging to note that CMS also has properly equipped facilities for personal survival training. The current programmes offered at CMS, is shown in Table 4.

It has to be noted that throughout this period, parallel to the government initiatives, some private parties also conducted training on IMO basic courses and Niyami courses.

TABLE 4. COURSES OFFERED BY CMS, MNU

	2021			2022			2023			2024			2025 End Oct			TOTAL PASSED
	Courses conducted	Students	Passed	Courses conducted	Students	Passed	Courses conducted	Students	Passed	Courses conducted	Students	Passed	Courses conducted	Students	Passed	
1 Electronic Chart Display And Information Systems - ECDIS	3	17	17	1	4	4	1	3	3	1	10	10				34
2 Security Awareness Training For All Port Facility Personnel				3	53	53				1	10	10				63
3 Security Awareness Training For Port Facility Personnel With Designated Security Duties				3	32	32				1	10	10				42
4 Certificate 3 in Marine Operations										1	5	3				3
Certificate																
Diploma																
BSc																
5 Certificate 4 in Marine Operations																
Certificate				1	9	5	1	4	3				2	6		8
Diploma																
BSc																
6 Certificate 3 in Marine Engineering																
Certificate																
Diploma																
BSc																
7 Advanced Certificate in Marine Engineering																
Certificate																
Diploma																
BSc																
8 R & U - Proficiency in Fire Prevention & Fire Fighting	6	94	94	2	31	31	4	40	40	3	25	25	4	53	53	243
9 Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GOC)										1	8	8				8
10 R & U - Proficiency in Personal Survival Techniques	7	92	92	2	31	31	4	41	41	3	25	25	4	53	53	242
11 R & U - Proficiency in Elementary First Aid	7	96	96	2	31	31	4	40	40	3	26	26	4	53	53	246
12 R & U - Proficiency in Personnel Safety & Social Responsibilities	7	93	93	2	31	31	4	41	41	3	25	25	4	54	54	244
13 R & U - Proficiency in Survival Craft & Rescue Boats other than fast rescue boats	5	27	27	1	6	6	4	20	20	2	9	9	3	25	25	87
14 R & U - Proficiency in Advanced Fire Fighting	1	7	5	1	3	3	1	1	1				1	1	1	10
15 Master and Deck Officer R & U Course (MDRUC)	2	13	13	1	5	5	2	9	9	2	14	14	3	21	21	62
16 Engineer Officer R & U Course (EORUC)	2	24	24	1	7	7	1	4	4	1	2	2	3	31	31	68
17 Proficiency in Ship Security Awareness				1	4	4	1	19	19	1	9	9	2	7	7	39
18 Proficiency in Designated Security Duties (PDSD)				1	3	3				1	8	8	2	7	7	18
19 Anti Piracy Awareness (APA)										1	7	7	1	4	4	11
20 Marine Environmental Awareness				1	5	5				1	7	7	1	3	3	15
21 Proficiency in Ship Security Officer										1	9	9				9
22 Proficiency in Fire Prevention and Fire Fighting (PFPFF)				3	20	19	1	19	19	3	35	35	2	10	10	83
23 Radar Navigation at Operational Level (RNOL)	1	1	1							1	9	9				10
24 Radar Navigation at Management Level (RNML)										1	4	4				4
25 Proficiency in Rating Forming Part of a Navigational Watch (PRFPNW)																
26 Proficiency in Rating Forming Part of an Engineering Watch (PRFPEW)																
27 Proficiency in Personal Survival Techniques (PPST)				3	18	18	1	19	19	3	31	30	2	9	9	76
28 Proficiency in Personal Safety and Social Responsibilities (PSSR)				1	6	6	1	19	19	2	24	21	2	12	12	58
29 Port Facility Security Officer (PFSO)													1	10	10	10
30 Company Security Officer (CSO)																0
31 Proficiency in Elementary First Aid (PEFA)				1	3	3	1	19	19	3	32	29	2	11	11	62
32 Proficiency in Basic Oil and Chemical Tanker Operations (PBOCTO)	3	29	29	1	4	4	1	7	7	1	21	21	3	21	21	82
33 Fallhuvering Course (FCC)	2	29	29	6	81	77	3	25	25	4	56	56	4	14	14	201
34 Niyamikamuge Certificate 1 (NC1)	1	10	10	1	11	11							1	10	10	31
35 Niyamikamuge Certificate 2 (NC2)	5	46	46	8	150	149	1	23	23	12	267	263	5	114	113	594
36 Proficiency in Medical First Aid (PMFA)							1	7	7	1	8	8				15
37 Petroleum Safety and Quantity Assessment (PSQA)										2	14	13				13
38 Proficiency in Survival Craft & Rescue Boats other than fast rescue boats (PSCRB)										1	5	5				5
39 Proficiency in Advanced Fire Fighting (PAFF)										1	12	12				12
40 Advanced Training for Oil Tanker Cargo Operations (ATOTCO)													2	20	19	19
41 Training Course for Instructors (IMO Model course 6.09) TOT													1	7	7	7
42 Proficiency in Fire Prevention and Fire Fighting (PFPFF.FHTS) - For Faculty of Tourism Studies	4	78	78	5	59	59	4	61	61	5	68	68	5	94	94	360
TOTAL	56	656	654	52	607	597	41	421	420	67	795	781	64	650	642	
R&U = Refresherand updating																

Source: CMS, Maldives National University

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is clear that shipping and seafaring in the Maldives has seen better days. It is in a dire state. Reasons for the decline are many, but numbers speak the truth. Successive governments have failed to appreciate the significance of the industry to the nation; how much it has given and how much potential it holds for the future of the country. The maritime industry is clearly very important for the Maldives. Since Maldivians are born seafarers, international seafaring is an extension of an inherent trait. The financial and economic benefits of the shipping and seafaring industry are clearly evident from the contributions they have made to the standards of living of island communities and to the development of some islands and the country as a whole. The industry has also provided for a relatively high level of foreign currency. Looking at modern day seafaring wages, it is a profession commanding very high incomes. With own ships, the dependency on foreign freight can be reduced and also create more employment opportunities for locals. Having a fleet is also strategically very important for a nation surrounded by water. Additionally, Maldives can capitalise on its reputation for tourism, through the shipping sector, by creating niche markets for cruise vessels and super yachts.

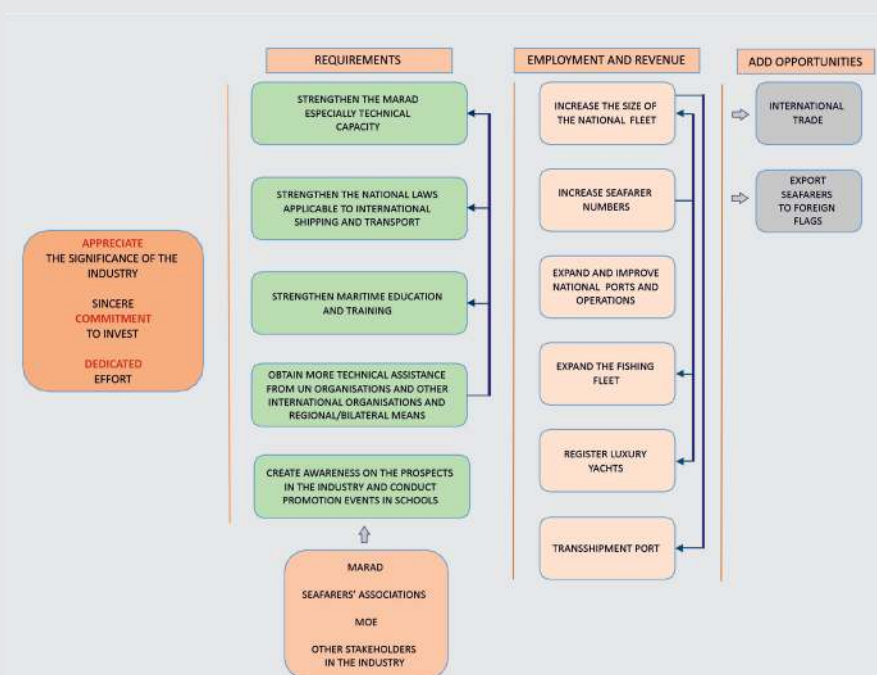
Ports are an indispensable node in the supply chain of transport of goods by sea. Shipping cannot do without ports as ports cannot do without ships. Therefore, efficient ports

with trained personnel is also a pre requisite for a successful shipping industry. Maldives, being situated in one of the busiest East-West shipping routes, the port sector can further be enhanced by ventures such as a transshipment port. For an economy so heavily skewed and almost totally dependent on tourism, strengthening the maritime industry would certainly help towards creating a more diversified economy.

To achieve a meaningful result, that would also be sustainable, there are many pre-requisites that will have to be fulfilled. Though there will be many ways to reach these objectives, the author proposes a model that can be used as a guideline for this purpose (Fig 5).

The first and most important requirement is 'sincere commitment and dedication'; without this initial step, none of which that follows, will work. It is a known fact that in the Maldives, since President Nasir's time, or perhaps even before that, till today, no significant public project or initiative will take off, and subsequently be supported in sincere spirit, without the 'blessings' of the head of the executive branch and a few influential people close to them. In this regard, even for this venture, even for it to be considered as a worthy cause, there has to be the blessings and sincere intent to undertake it, at the very highest echelon of the government.

FIG 5. A MODEL TO IMPROVE THE MALDIVES MARITIME INDUSTRY



One of the initial steps would be to strengthen the capacity of the maritime administration. Some attempts have been made in previous years in this respect, but seldom have any of these progressed beyond paper exercises; simply because there has been no sincere commitment from the very top. Qualified and competent people need to be employed. If they are not available from the Maldives, then the services of expatriate ex-seafaring officers need to be sought. Locals can be trained under their guidance. These positions may not attract qualified people under the Maldives Civil Service wage scales. The maritime administration may need to be made financially and administratively independent or in the interim, even under the existing set-up, such persons can be employed on contractual basis. If the vast number of political appointees employed in the umbrella Ministry, many of whom have very little to contribute, can be reduced, that would also prove positive in this respect. Either way, this is a definite pre-requisite to move forward. Parallel to this, local seafarers can be 'on-the-job' trained in such areas as vessel surveying and inspections, working alongside seasoned professionals from neighbouring shipping nations like Singapore, Malaysia, India and Sri Lanka through bilateral cooperation. Meanwhile the shipping laws of the nation have to be strengthened taking into account all its relevant obligations including those with regard to the international conventions it is party to. They also would have to be translated to the English language to enhance foreign trade and investment.

Maritime Education and training has to be strengthened and streamlined in accordance with policy objectives for the future. If it is to create or revive the maritime status of the Maldives as a shipping and seafaring nation, then the objective must also be to create seafarers rather than just support the existing few with augmentative courses. As such it again poses the question of capacity to teach and train. Apart from the few lecturers available in the country, expatriate expertise would be needed. Heavy investment in terms of equipment such as machinery and simulators would also be needed. Some existing resources from other institutions could be shared. To make it financially viable, economies of scale would dictate that such programmes be designed not only for Maldivian participation but also geared towards regional enrolment, in the least. This in turn means that such training programmes must be attractive enough for international students to seek participation in these.

The country's budget may not need to bear the full financial load. There may be areas where bilateral cooperation may be sought, as stated earlier. Additionally, UN agencies like the IMO and ILO may be available to provide technical assistance in many relevant areas. These have to be explored and sought more vigorously.

Even though remuneration is extremely attractive in seafaring, the declining attractiveness of seafaring careers for younger people means that there is a shortage of close to 100,000 officers globally. Yet, at the same time, there is a surplus of more than that same number for ratings. This translates to the fact that as most ship-owners prefer the same complement of ratings and officers, they would tend to employ ratings from countries which can also supply officers. If Maldives wants to revive this industry, it has to produce ships' officers. Apart from strengthening education and training, this would also mean that it would need a lot of effort put into marketing. The word on the positives of the profession has to be spread among the young, especially in schools.

The model given also shows areas of investment, employment and revenue as well as further diversification from then on. The task ahead is huge, but the potential for rewards is immense.

AUTHOR

Dr Azmath is an Honorary Lecturer at Cardiff University and a Governing Board member of the International Ocean Institute. He is an academic researcher and maritime consultant. His research interests include maritime transport and marine management with focus on the welfare and human rights of people working at sea. He has a PhD. from Cardiff University, in maritime transport policy and is a Class 1 Marine Engineer (DoT, UK) and a Chartered Marine Technologist. He has sea-going experience and has also worked as a Director in the maritime administration of the Maldives. Dr Jaleel has provided consultancy services to a number of organisations including the Asian Development Bank, the European Commission and the Seafarers' Rights International, UK, on maritime and marine environment related projects, made keynote presentations at several international conferences and has published academic papers and made contributions to books.



Photo: Maldives Ports Limited,
Malé Commercial Harbour

The Custodian of the Maldives' Trade Arteries: A Quantitative Analysis of MPL's Operational Milestones (2025–2020)



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

Introduction

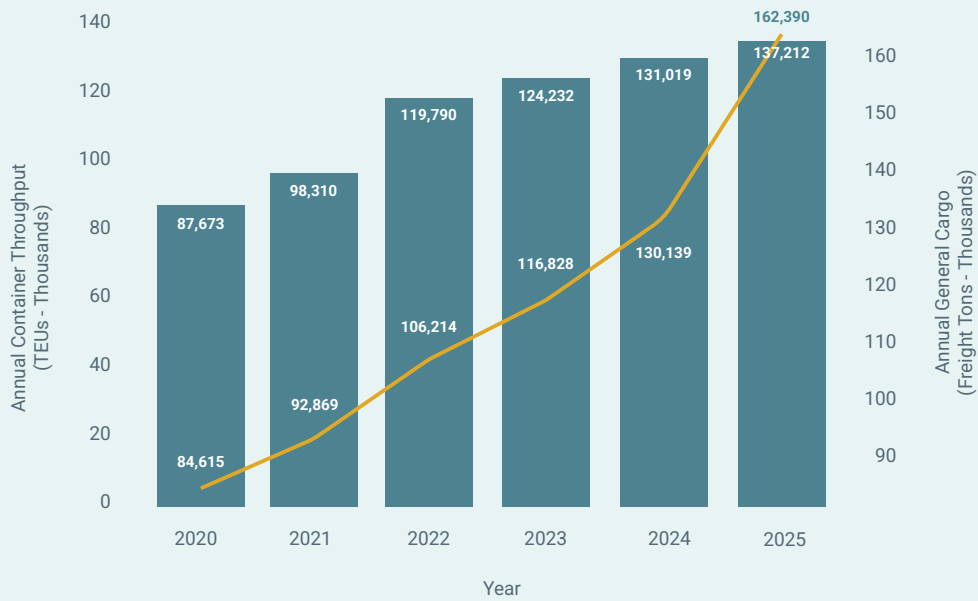
The Maldives' supply chains do not move across land; they move across water. In an island nation of dispersed geography and limited redundancy, ports are not simply infrastructure assets, they are national lifelines. At the center of this system stands Maldives Ports Limited (MPL), the custodian of the Maldives' trade arteries, ensuring the continuous movement of food, fuel, construction materials, and consumer goods that sustain economic and social life.

This article examines MPL through the lens of operational statistics, capacity, and achievements. By analyzing the data recorded between 2020 and 2025, we can interpret what these figures reveal about institutional maturity, resilience, and readiness for the future.

Macro-Operational Scale: Volume as an Economic Barometer

MPL's cargo throughput acts as a real-time pulse of the Maldivian economy. Over the past five years, the Maldives has seen a steady recovery and subsequent growth in trade volume, effectively moving beyond the pandemic impact of 2020.

Graph A: Cargo Throughput Trends (2020-2025)

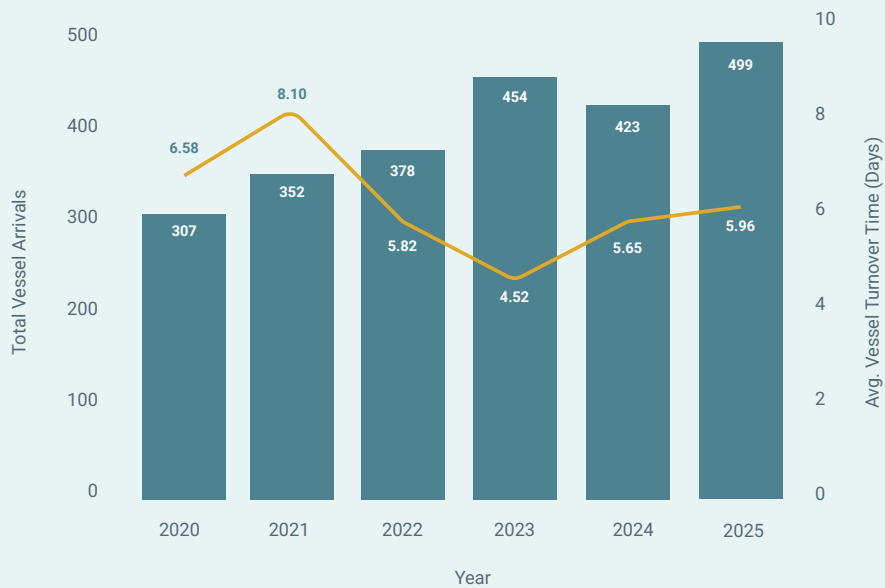


As illustrated in Graph A, container throughput has grown from 87,673 TEUs in 2020 to a projected 137,212 TEUs by the end of 2025. This represents a 56 percent increase in volume. Parallel to containerized trade, general cargo measured in freight tons has seen even more aggressive growth, nearly doubling from 84,615 tons in 2020 to over 162,390 tons in 2025. This scale is managed despite significant spatial constraints at the Malé Commercial Harbour, highlighting the success of yard optimization and the recent 40 percent expansion of storage capacity to 5,100 TEUs.

Efficiency Metrics: Bridging the Infrastructure Gap

A port's maturity is defined by its ability to minimize the time a ship spends in harbor. Currently, the Malé Commercial Harbour faces a structural bottleneck due to the inability to support shore-based cranes, forcing reliance on slower vessel cranes. Despite this, MPL has managed a surge in vessel traffic.

Graph B: Operational Efficiency Trends (2020-2025)



Analysis of vessel arrivals in Graph B shows a steady increase from 307 annual calls in 2020 to 499 calls in 2025. While the increased volume per vessel has kept pressure on turnaround times, strategic interventions, including the launch of the MyBandharu digital portal and -24hour clearing, have stabilized the average Vessel Turnaround Time at approximately 5.96 days in 2025. This is a significant improvement from the 8.10 days recorded in 2021. These efficiency gains are vital because reducing port time directly lowers freight costs for shippers and prevents price volatility in local markets.

The Multimodal Pivot: Achievements Beyond the Shore

The launch of the Sea-to-Air Transshipment service in May 2024 represents MPL's most significant strategic achievement in this five-year window. It marks the transition from being a destination port to a transit hub.

- **Market Adoption:** In its first year, the service reached a monthly peak of 433 tonnes, serving 20 global destinations.
- **Economic Diversification:** The service now integrates 18 international airlines, leveraging underutilized belly capacity on flights at Velana International Airport. This creates a new foreign currency stream and positions the Maldives as a competitive alternative to regional hubs.

Safeguarding National Supply Chain Stability

The handling of essential goods remains the most vital function of MPL. Monthly data reveals that during peak consumption periods, such as the lead-up to Ramadan or year-end construction booms, MPL's clearance rates reach record highs. In the latter half of 2024 and 2025, the port cleared over 13,000 TEUs per month. Dedicated Perishable Warehouses and priority lanes ensure that food items and temperature-sensitive goods reach the market within hours of docking, acting as a safeguard against disruption.

Future Outlook: Capacity Meets Strategy

As throughput approaches the physical ceiling of the current harbour, MPL is shifting toward predictive capacity planning. The data from 2020 to 2025 makes one thing clear: the transition to the Thilafushi Port is a national necessity.

The upcoming relocation is designed to modernize the Maldives' maritime infrastructure completely. By introducing shore-based mobile harbor cranes, MPL projects a reduction in vessel turnaround from current levels to under 2 days. This 70 percent efficiency gain is estimated to save shippers millions in operational charges, a saving that will eventually trickle down to the Maldivian consumer.

Conclusion

MPL's statistics tell a broader story of institutional resilience and national responsibility. From handling 87k TEUs in 2020 to nearly 140k TEUs in 2025, the organization has proven its ability to scale under pressure. As the custodian of the nation's trade arteries, MPL's future will be defined not by how much it handles, but by how intelligently it plans, coordinates, and delivers. The transition from a port of entry to a regional logistics hub is well underway, backed by data and driven by a vision of a more resilient Maldives.

AUTHOR

Saruvaan Hussain Husnee is currently working as a Senior Business Development Executive at Maldives Ports Limited (MPL). An alumnus of the University of Hertfordshire with an Undergraduate degree in Accountancy and ACCA qualification, he brings a decade of experience across the financial, analytical, and commercial sectors. He leverages this multi-disciplinary background to drive strategic growth and institutional modernization within the Maldives' maritime gateway.



MALDIVES PORTS LIMITED: Highlights for 2025

Building Capacity, Strengthening Communities, and Shaping the Port of Tomorrow



Maisa Ibrahim Naeem
Manager, Marketing & PR
Maldives Ports Limited



*Photo: Maldives Ports Limited
Malé Commercial Harbour*

In 2025, Maldives Ports Limited (MPL) continues to strengthen its role as a national enabler of trade, connectivity, and socio-economic development. As the sole commercial port operator in the Maldives, MPL's mandate extends beyond port operations; it touches national resilience, workforce development, safety, and community well-being. This year marketing a period of purposeful progress, with key achievements across governance, partnerships, human capital development, safety preparedness, and community engagement, reflecting MPL's evolving role in supporting a growing island nation.

Strengthening Institutional Foundations

A major milestone in 2025 was the expansion of MPL's jurisdiction over the Malé North Harbour territory up to the local fish market. This development enhanced operational coordination and reinforced MPL's responsibility in managing one of the country's most active maritime zones. The expanded jurisdiction allows for more streamlined port oversight, improve safety controls, and better alignment between port activities and surrounding urban functions.

Equally significant was the revival of Ulhandhu, MPL's corporate newsletter, which was reintroduced as an internal platform to strengthen communication, transparency, and staff engagement. Building on this momentum, MPL also launched the Ulhandhu Journal, the External Edition, creating a new platform to share port-related stories, national maritime developments, and institutional milestones with a wider audience. Together, these platforms reflect MPL's commitment to open communication and storytelling as part of its corporate identity.

In line with its inclusive values, MPL made notable progress in accessibility and representation. The company extended 40 Job Offers to Persons with Disabilities, reinforcing its belief that meaningful employment should be accessible to all. Complementing this effort, new accessibility features were introduced on the MPL website, ensuring improved digital access for users with diverse needs. These initiatives underscore MPL's ongoing commitment to inclusion, dignity, and equal opportunity.

Strategic Partnerships & National Collaboration

Partnerships remained a cornerstone of MPL's progress in 2025. Over the course of the year, 11 Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) were signed, spanning staff development, service enhancement, and port expansion initiatives.

In the area of human capital development, MOUs with the Maldives National University (MNU), Maldives National Skills Development Authority (MNSDA), and the Ministry of Youth strengthened pathways for training, professional development, and youth engagement. These collaborations aim to ensure that the Maldivian maritime workforce is equipped with the skills required to meet evolving industry demands.

MPL also entered into service development partnerships with key national institutions, including the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, MIFCO, and ALIA Investments. These agreements support broader economic objectives by enhancing logistics, trade facilitation, and service delivery across port-linked sectors.

Port development and expansion featured prominently among the year's partnerships, with initiatives focused on Kudahuvadhoo, Kulhudhuffushi, and the expansion of Malé North Harbor. These projects reflect MPL's long-term vision of decentralized port development, improved regional access, and strengthened national logistics networks.

Investing in People: Learning and Development

Capacity building remained a defining focus for MPL in 2025. A total of 51 training programmes were conducted during the year, benefiting 1,399 staff members across the organization. These trainings covered a broad range of operational, technical, safety, and professional development areas, reinforcing a culture of continuous learning.

A landmark achievement was the resumption of the UNCTAD Modern Port Management Programme after a -12 year hiatus. Its return to the Maldives marked a renewed commitment to developing future port leaders with global perspectives and locally relevant expertise. The programme strengthens MPL's leadership pipeline while contributing to national capacity in port governance and management.

In addition, MPL continued to invest in practical skills development through its Apprenticeship Programme, which welcomed 20 participants, and its Internship Programme, which provided hands-on industry exposure to 8 students. These initiatives play a critical role in bridging the gap between education and employment, particularly in technical and operational fields.

Safety, Security, and Emergency Preparedness

Ensuring safe and secure port operations remained a top priority in 2025. MPL conducted ISPS and port security drills across Malé Commercial Harbour, Kulhudhuffushi Port, and Hithadhoo Port, reinforcing compliance with international security standards and improving emergency readiness.

Fire safety and first aid drills were carried out throughout the year, alongside agility tests and emergency response training designed to enhance staff preparedness. These exercises not only strengthen response capabilities but also foster a strong safety culture across all port facilities.

Two major infrastructure milestones further reinforced MPL's safety framework: the inauguration of a new Fire Extinguisher Refill Facility and the opening of a new Health and Safety Facility. These additions enhance in-house capacity, improve response times, and contribute to a safer working environment for employees and port users alike.

Community Engagement & Social Responsibility

Community engagement remained central to MPL's identity in 2025, with over 15 CSR initiatives carried out during the year. MPL partnered with Maldives Police Service under a Community Safety Partnership initiative, reflecting a collaborative approach to public safety and awareness.

The company also supported practical community needs, including assistance with water drainage efforts and a cleaning operation at the West Lighterage Berth. Infrastructure-focused CSR initiatives included the completion of renovations at Isravvehinge Naadhee, preserving a space of cultural and community significance.

MPL's commitment to social well-being was further demonstrated through visits to the pediatric wards of Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital and Hulhumalé Hospital, bringing moments of care and connection to young patients and their families.

Education and outreach featured strongly through the Badhahi Programme, under which students from five schools and institutions, including Maldives Polytechnic, Hiriya School, Aminiya School, Dhiggaru School, and Dh. Bandidhoo School, visited MPL to learn about port operations and maritime careers. In parallel, three regional business forums were held in Addu, Fuvahmulah, and N. Manadhoo, strengthening dialogue with local business communities.



Photo: Maldives Ports Limited



Events and Corporate Culture

Throughout 2025, MPL actively participated in national exhibitions and public events, including the Maldives Marine Expo, Vara Expo 2025, and Eid Haveeru 1446. Internally, staff engagement remained a priority, with initiatives such as MPL Tharaavees for staff fostering togetherness during Ramadan.

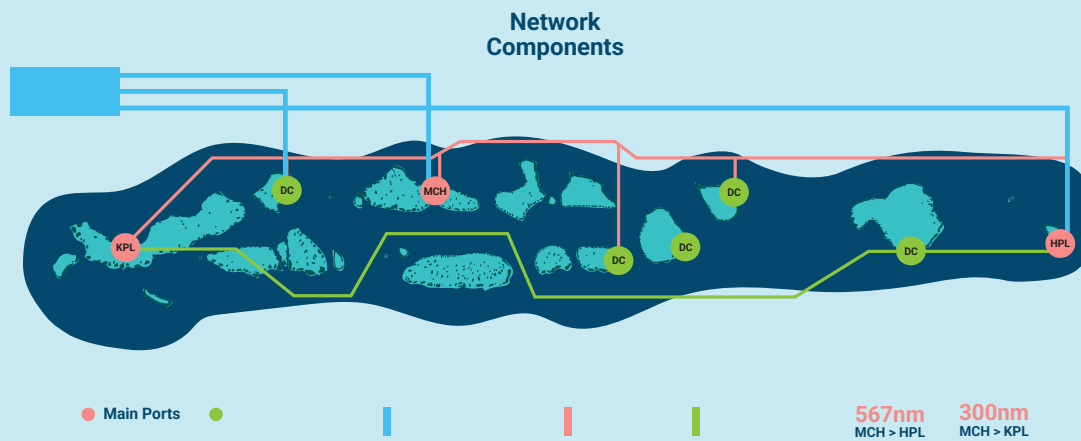
The year concluded with the 39th Anniversary Staff Night, a celebration recognizing the collective effort, dedication, and resilience of MPL's workforce. The event served as a moment of reflection on past achievements and a reaffirmation of shared purpose moving forward.

AUTHOR

Maisa Ibrahim Naeem is a marketing and communications professional with an MBA and over a decade of experience across diverse sectors. Her work spans strategic marketing, branding, public relations, and stakeholder engagement, with a focus on translating complex ideas into clear and purposeful communication. She has led initiatives across corporate, public sector, and development-oriented projects, supporting organisational visibility, credibility, and long-term strategic goals. She brings a practical, insight-driven approach to communication that aligns strategy with real-world impact.

Looking Ahead

The highlights of 2025 reflect MPL's steady progress toward becoming a more inclusive, resilient, and future-ready port organization. Through strategic partnerships, investment in people, strengthened safety systems, and meaningful community engagement, MPL continues to shape ports not just as gateways for trade, but as pillars of national development. As the organization moves forward, the foundations laid in 2025 will continue to guide its journey toward sustainable growth and shared prosperity.



The National Logistics Plan: Transforming Connectivity, Economic Stability, & Regional Equity in the Maldives



Ali Asif
Business Development Analyst, Business Development & Projects
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A country's logistics system is one of the most powerful determinants of its economic competitiveness, social well-being, and national resilience. In the Maldives, where communities are distributed across nearly 200 inhabited islands, the effectiveness of logistics plays an even more central role in shaping daily life. For decades, however, the Maldives has relied on a fragmented and largely ad hoc logistics model that could not keep pace with modern demands. Unpredictable vessel schedules, heavy dependence on Malé, poor cold-chain capacity, and weak digital integration have created inefficiencies that influence everything from the price of onions to the delivery of medicines.

The National Logistics Plan represents a comprehensive response to these longstanding issues. It creates a structured, predictable, digitally enabled national logistics backbone that strengthens regional equity, reduces costs, and enhances the reliability of supply chains across the country. It envisions a structured National Logistics Backbone that provides predictable, scheduled, and transparent connectivity across the country, treating logistics as a public essential for economic stability and national development.

The Longstanding Challenges in the Maldives' Logistics Landscape

Unpredictable Vessel Schedules & Excess Inventory Costs

The need for reform stems from vulnerabilities that have persisted for decades, the most significant of which is the unpredictability of vessel frequency. Retailers and wholesalers in the outer atolls routinely face long intervals between shipments, compelling them to hold substantial safety stocks, sometimes equivalent to a month's worth of inventory. This ties up working capital, increases storage expenses, and contributes to higher consumer prices. The lack of predictability affects procurement cycles, leads to frequent stock-outs, and magnifies the price differences between Malé and the outer atolls.

Over-Centralisation in the Malé Region

Over-centralization further exacerbates these challenges. At present, almost all imports are cleared and stored in the Malé region irrespective of their eventual destination. This model produces several systemic challenges:

- Congestion in Malé Harbour and surrounding logistics areas
- Longer replenishment cycles for north and south atolls
- Increased reliance on double-handling
- Nationwide disruption when Malé faces weather delays or operational bottlenecks

A single point of dependence leaves the entire supply chain vulnerable.

Cold-Chain and Quality Constraints

Unreliable scheduling also undermines supply quality, particularly for essential goods such as fruits, vegetables, pharmaceuticals, and temperature-sensitive products that deteriorate quickly without proper handling or timely transport. The absence of a well-functioning cold-chain in many islands has historically resulted in:

- Fresh produce arriving in poor condition
- Higher spoilage rates
- Higher markups as traders incorporate wastage costs
- Reduced availability of temperature-sensitive goods, including pharmaceuticals in the atolls

This disproportionately affects households outside Malé and undermines national food security.

Fragmented Digital Systems

Many logistics processes remain manual or siloed. Traders often rely on calls, personal contacts, or fragmented digital channels to track shipments. Documentation is paper-heavy and time consuming. The lack of integrated systems limits transparency, creates inefficiencies, and makes it difficult for government institutions to monitor overall performance.

A Structured National Logistics Backbone

The National Logistics Plan proposes a coordinated and comprehensive framework to how goods flow across the country. It focuses on three integrated pillars: predictable trunk routes, regional Distribution Centers (DCs), and a modern digital architecture through PCS and NSW.

Scheduled Maritime Trunk Routes

The backbone of the new system is a network of scheduled trunk routes connecting Malé Commercial Harbour, Kulhudhuffushi Port, and Hithadhoo Port.

Key features include:

- Fixed weekly or fortnightly schedules
- Published cut-off times
- Assured capacity for FCL and LCL cargo
- Standardised service levels (frequency, punctuality, handling times)

Predictable trunk operations will allow businesses to reduce safety stock, optimise cash flow, and plan procurement more efficiently. Over time, these trunk routes will form the backbone of a nationwide reliability system, connecting every atoll through secondary feeder networks and strategic partnerships.

Regional Distribution Centres: Enhancing Regional Equity

Complementing the trunk routes are Regional Distribution Centers located in the northern and southern Free-Zones, which will bring modern logistics services to the regions. These DCs will offer:

- Bonded warehousing
- Cross-docking
- Cold-chain storage
- Dedicated 3PL zones
- Staging areas for inter-island distribution

Their impact extends beyond storage; they function as regional economic hubs, allowing wholesalers and retailers to move inventory closer to demand. This reduces Malé's limited warehouse space, lowers operational costs, and supports region-based trading ecosystems.

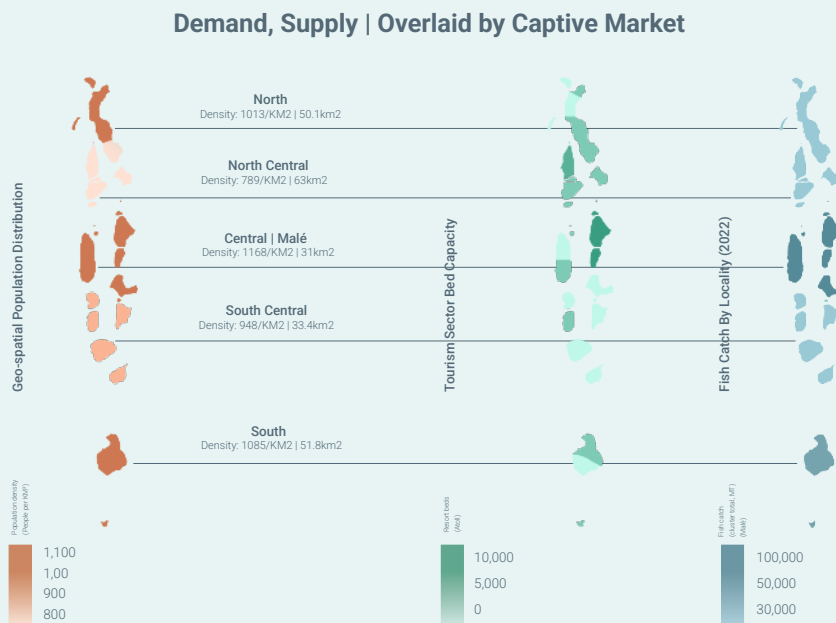
Strengthening Food Security and Supply Reliability

Regional warehousing helps stabilise supply during weather disruptions or market shocks. Cold-storage capacity ensures perishable goods are handled at proper temperatures, reducing spoilage and improving quality. This directly benefits households, schools, hospitals, and local businesses.

Photo: Maldives Ports Limited
Malé North Harbour



Economic Impact: Reducing Inflation and Stabilizing Prices



Lowering Logistics-Driven Inflation

Addressing the logistical inefficiencies present in nearly every product, the National Logistics Plan can reduce price disparities and national inflation while delivering broad and measurable economic benefits. Predictable schedules allow businesses to hold lower inventory, reducing working capital requirements. With reliable replenishment cycles, wholesalers no longer need to stock months of goods in advance, which lowers financing costs, storage expenses, and product wastage. At the same time, decentralizing warehousing to cost-effective regional Distribution Centers further decreases the overall cost of doing business. Enhanced cold-chain logistics reduce spoilage, ensuring more consistent product quality and lower retail prices for perishable goods.

CASE STUDY:

The Tuticorin–Addu Perishables Route

The impact of these measures is clearly illustrated by the Tuticorin–Addu perishables service. The direct south-bound route, bypassing Malé and connecting India to Addu, reduced landed prices for key items such as onions, potatoes, and eggs by up to 23 percent. The success of this route demonstrates the potential of regional access points and structured logistics to create more equitable national pricing.

Empowering Producers and Reducing Empty Return Journeys

The plan also tackles a long-standing inefficiency in domestic logistics: empty return-journeys. Through structured backhaul programs, exporters, farmers, fishers, and SMEs will have access to affordable and predictable transport for outbound goods. This is particularly crucial in the north and south, where agriculture, fish processing, and manufacturing are expanding sectors. The Plan introduces formal backhaul arrangements, enabling:

- Predictable outbound cargo capacity
- Discounted return-leg rates
- Full visibility of available space through the Port Community System
- Better market access for fishers, farmers, SMEs, and exporters

This strengthens rural economies, supports livelihoods, and reduces environmental impacts by improving vessel utilization.

Governance: Ensuring Reliable, Long-Term Implementation

Scheduled Maritime Trunk Routes

The National Logistics Plan will be established with a clear institutional framework, with the participation of multiple stakeholders, to ensure effective implementation. Policy direction will be provided by the Ministry of Economic Development, while the Ministry of Finance will oversee Public Service Obligation (PSO) contracting. Maldives Ports Limited (MPL) will operate the trunk routes, manage the Distribution Centers, and collaborate with private feeder operators to ensure nationwide coverage. Oversight will be maintained through an independent technical auditor, supported by data from the Port Community System (PCS) and AIS, to validate performance metrics and enforce service-level agreements.

Multi-Agency Collaboration

Key partners include Customs, Free-Zone authorities, atoll councils, state enterprises, fisheries processors, and private logistics companies. This multi-agency coordination is vital to building a logistics ecosystem that serves the entire nation, rather than fragmented or isolated interests.

Digital Integration: Real-Time Visibility and Transparency

A critical pillar of the logistics transformation is the introduction of comprehensive digital integration through the Port Community System (PCS) and the National Single Window (NSW).

These platforms unify data streams across carriers, ports, Customs, DCs, and traders, enabling real-time visibility over cargo movements. Through electronic documentation, automated timestamping using AIS data, and dashboard-based monitoring of on-time performance, the system enhances transparency and reduces administrative burden. Traders can book slots, track shipments, receive notifications, and access documentation online, reducing reliance on paperwork and fragmented communication. For public institutions, this visibility improves planning for school supplies, medical procurement, agricultural inputs, and emergency relief, which is critical in a geographically dispersed country like the Maldives.

Modernizing PSO Delivery

The digital component also supports a new outcome-based Public Service Obligation framework. Instead of subsidizing operational costs or vessel mileage, the state will compensate service providers based on achieved frequency, punctuality, capacity, and delivery consistency. This arrangement ensures efficient use of public funds, incentivizes high-quality performance, and maintains essential services for islands with low commercial volumes.

A Transformational Step Forward

The National Logistics Plan stands as one of the most ambitious and transformative initiatives in the Maldives' economic history. It replaces a fragmented, unpredictable, and costly logistics system with a structured, digitally integrated, and regionally inclusive backbone. Benefits such as lower prices, fresher food, better supply reliability, stronger regional economies, and improved public services extend to every community in the Maldives. Through its combination of physical infrastructure, digital systems, backhaul programmes, and clear governance, the Plan sets the foundation for a more equitable, resilient, and economically vibrant Maldives.

AUTHOR

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Beyond The Capital:

MPL Links Tuticorin to Regional Ports



Mohamed Shabaan Shabau
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The Maldives - An Archipelago of Trade, Culture, and Connectivity

34,750 square miles, of which only **0.331%** is made up of dry land, an archipelago that stretches around 820 km from North to South and 130 km East to West, comprising of **26** atolls and **1,192** islands, the Maldives is known for its spectacular natural beauty and marine environment. International trade has been occurring in the Maldives from since as early as the 9th century, when Arab merchants and

travelers have mentioned the chain of islands as a source of cowrie shells. Owing to its strategic location in the Indian Ocean, Maldives has been a vital link in trade routes from the East and West, where many vessels made regular stopovers across the atolls for fresh water, provisions and shelter during seasonal monsoon changes.

Modernizing Maldives' Trade and Connectivity & The Rise of Northern and Southern Hubs

The modern Malé Commercial Harbour began its operations in September 1986, as part of a major redevelopment to serve as the country's principal port. Developed to modernize and centralize national maritime trade, MCH remains the core international maritime gateway for the Maldives. It serves as the primary hub for inbound and outbound goods for the archipelago, with around 150 vessels docking at MCH monthly in 2025.

In an effort to decentralize maritime logistics and to provide direct port access and infrastructure to the northern and southern regions of the country, Kulhudhuffushi Port Limited and Hithadhoo Port Limited were open for service of the 5th and 6th of December 2005 respectively. This aimed to reduce reliance on Malé as the sole cargo distribution point, cut down transportation costs as well as improve supply chain efficiency for local economies outside the capital city. While these regional ports may not reflect the role of a major international gateway like MCH, they have started to directly receive vessels from international waters.

From Tuticorin to the Atolls

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PRODUCE	NO.	TYPE OF UNIT
Eggs	29,320	Cartons
Onion	13,640	G/Bags
Potato	8,660	G/Bags
Cabbage	3,255	G/Bags
Watermelon	6,740	G/Bags
Tomatoes	4,671	Crates
Coconut	603	G/Bags
Banana	1,144	Bunch
Cement	859	J/Bags
Project Cargo	4,141.55	Tons

1. Cargo shipped in 2025

When comparing the retail prices of some of these perishables to their prices in Male, it is fascinating to note that they are significantly cheaper in Addu. This allows local retailers to earn more profit when their cargo is directly imported to Addu rather than having to transport them from Malé. This will benefit local consumers as they will be presented with cheaper prices for these goods.

TYPE OF CARGO	UNIT	RETAIL PRICE IN MALE' (MVR)	RETAIL PRICE IN ADDU (MVR)	SAVINGS (%)
Eggs	Carton	380	330	13%
Cabbage	Bags	290	240	17%
Tomato	Bags	290	240	17%
Watermelon	Bags	300	250	17%
Onion	Bags	220	170	23%
Potato	Bags	280	230	18%



Photo: Maldives Ports Limited
Kulhudhuffushi Port

2. Price comparison between Addu and Malé

Kulhudhuffushi saw its first cargo boat arrive from Tuticorin in November 2025. The vessel 'VB Progress' carried perishable goods as well as construction materials. The purpose of establishing this route is that it provides a direct seaborne connection between Tuticorin and the northern Maldives. Implementing this route is especially beneficial in terms of reducing time and costs, as well as to lower the prices of these goods in Kulhudhuffushi and nearby islands.

QTY	CBM/FT	GOOD	TYPE OF UNIT
5	0.15	Brinjal	Crate
6	1.23	Cabbage	Sling net
145	146.45	Cement	Bags
6	0.16	Coconut	Gunny
280	9.42	Fresh table eggs	Carton
3	2.94	Gi pipe 1 inch	Bundles
9	3.25	Gi pipe 1.5 inch	Bundles
4	3.60	Gi pipe 2 inches	Bundles
2	2.40	Gi pipe 3/4 inch	Bundles
2	0.06	Green chilly	Crate
3	0.09	Green mango	Crate
4	0.12	Lemon	Crate
4	2.02	Ms round bar 6mm	Bundles
15	7.58	Onion	Sling net
3	0.09	Palayamthodan	Crate
3	0.09	Papaya	Crate
1	0.52	Pineapple	J bags
5	2.28	Potato	Sling net
3	0.09	Pumpkin	Crate
19	18.97	Tmt bar 10mm	Bundles
4	4.00	Tmt bar 16mm	Bundles
5	5.00	Tmt bar 20mm	Bundles
1	0.52	Tomato	J bags
4	1.19	Watermelon	J bags
4	0.18	Yellow dais	Crate



Looking at the Future: Connectivity and Expansion

Historically dependent on Malé as the central hub, the island nation is now witnessing a decentralization of trade and logistics, driven by the introduction of direct international shipping routes from India to both regional ports. Looking to the future, the continued development of KPL and HPL, coupled with regular shipping schedules and targeted infrastructure upgrades, positions these regional ports as critical points in a more interconnected Maldivian Logistics Network. This network is expected to enhance regional trade,

increase local economic activity, and reduce overreliance on central infrastructure, signaling a transformative phase in the country's port operations. Ultimately, the successful integration of regional ports into international shipping routes heralds a future where Maldives' regional ports become active economic and logistical hubs, playing a central role in supporting sustainable growth, accessibility, and resilience across the archipelago.

AUTHOR

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The Maldives Maritime Conference

Evolution of a National Maritime Vision



Maisa Ibrahim Naeem
Manager, Marketing & PR
Maldives Ports Limited

Photo: Maldives Ports Limited



Being a nation defined by its seas, the Maldives has always relied on maritime connectivity to sustain its communities, support its economy and position the country. Over a thousand islands scattered across the Indian Ocean, the country's lifelines, from trade and transportation to national security and climate resilience are intrinsically maritime. However, the Maldives is moving forward with a renewed sense of purpose as the global dynamics change, and technology continues to redefine the maritime world. The aspiration embodied in the Maldives Maritime Conference (MMC), a unique platform initiated by Maldives Ports Limited (MPL) to strengthen strategic dialogue and chart a more confident and collaborative maritime future.

At its core, the Maldives Maritime Conferences was established to meet a simple yet powerful need; the need for a platform where the nation can engage with the global maritime community, explore evolving maritime challenges, and shape opportunities to align with its long-term vision. As ports and logistics systems globally, undergo rapid transformation driven by digitalization, automation, sustainability demands, and the complexities of modern trade, the Maldives recognizes that staying informed is no longer optional, but essential. Active participation in regional and international maritime conversations is essential to remain competitive, resilient, and ready for the future.

Creating a Platform for Maritime Dialogue

The Maldives Maritime Conference stands as a dedicated platform where diverse voices including government leaders, port operators, shipping lines, maritime organizations, trade representatives, academics, researchers, innovators and technology firms, and sustainability experts come together. It is a unique convergence of policy and practice, offering a platform where ideas can be exchanged openly and where the country can both learn from global counterparts and its own experiences.

The Inaugural Conference: Setting the Foundation in 2024

The inaugural Maldives Maritime Conference in 2024, marked a historic moment. It was the first time Maldives hosted a conference designed specifically to encourage structured maritime dialogue on such a scale. Held at a time when global supply chains were becoming increasingly unpredictable and when ports worldwide were being challenged to adapt to new efficiencies and emerging technologies, the 2024 edition provided timely relevance and impact. Discussions extended across a wide spectrum; modern port development, operational efficiency, maritime safety frameworks, environmental responsibility, workforce readiness, and the integration of digital tools into logistics and port management.

What distinguished the Maldives Maritime Conference 2024 was not merely the content shared but the environment it created. It became a setting where decision-makers could network with practitioners, where young professionals could learn directly from experienced experts, and where international guests could gain deeper understanding of the Maldives Maritime landscape. The event's success underscored a clear message: continuous engagement is essential for growth, and the Maldives is committed to investing in the conversations that shape its maritime future.

From Foundation to Continuity: Maldives Maritime Conference 2026

Encouraged by the achievements of its inaugural run, Maldives Ports Limited has remained steadfast in its belief that MMC should evolve into a recurring cornerstone event for the sector. This continuity now takes form with Maldives Maritime Conference 2026, an enhanced edition that builds on the foundation laid in 2024 while expanding the breadth and depth of its insights. Set to take place at Villa Nautica, Maldives, the upcoming conference reflects the industry's evolution over the last two years and responds to the shifting maritime landscape with forward-looking themes and dialogues.



Photo: Maldives Ports Limited

Securing Our Seas, Safeguarding Our Future

Anchored by the theme, “The 2nd Session of Expert Meeting: Securing Our Seas, Safeguarding Our Future”, MMC 2026 places maritime security, safety, and resilience at the centre of national and regional discourse. The theme reflects a growing understanding that secure maritime spaces are fundamental to economic stability, environmental stewardship, and national sovereignty, particularly for Small Island Developing States such as the Maldives, where vast ocean territories far exceed landmass.

A central focus of the 2026 conference is the role of maritime law and international cooperation in safeguarding the seas. Effective maritime governance relies on strong legal frameworks supported by coordinated enforcement and institutional collaboration. MMC 2026 will explore the role of coast guards and maritime authorities in ensuring safety and law enforcement at sea, while examining how legislation, regulatory alignment, and inter-agency cooperation can be strengthened to address increasingly complex maritime security challenges. In a region where maritime risks often transcend national boundaries, cooperation, both between states and across borders remains a vital pillar of maritime security.

Another key area of discussion is port and ship security, with particular emphasis on realities faced by small and medium-sized ports. These ports serve as critical gateways for island economies yet often operate with limited resources while being required to comply with international standards such as the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code. MMC 2026 will provide space to examine best practices in ISPS compliance, effective use of Port Facility Security Assessment (PFSA) tools, and the integration of port security systems that enhance protection while maintaining operational efficiency and service continuity.

Recognizing the Maldives geographic realities, the conference will adopt a strong regional and local perspective, focusing on maritime security challenges specific to Small Island Developing States. Managing vast Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and archipelagic waters present significant challenges in surveillance, maritime policing, and enforcement. Through expert led discussions, MMC 2026 will explore strategies to enhance maritime domain awareness, strengthen policing capabilities, and improve coordination across agencies tasked with safeguarding maritime spaces.

The evolving nature of maritime activity has also given rise to emerging maritime threats that demand renewed attention. As ports and vessels become increasingly digitised, cybersecurity risks now pose serious threats to navigation systems, port operations, and supply chains. At the same time, humans continue to exploit governance gaps. MMC 2026 will examine how policy innovation, technology adoption, intelligence-sharing, and regional cooperation can be leveraged to counter both traditional and non-traditional maritime threats.

Ensuring safety at sea and effective emergency response remains fundamental to maritime security. The conference will address institutional readiness, operational protocols, and coordination mechanisms related to maritime search and rescue (SAR). Discussions will also cover accident prevention on board ships and the implementation of international conventions such as the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), highlight both existing gaps and emerging innovations that can strengthen maritime safety outcomes and save lives.

Looking Ahead: A Secure and Resilient Maritime Future

Through these interconnected themes, MMC 2026 seeks to promote a holistic understanding of maritime security, one that integrates law, operations, technology, cooperation, and human capacity. The conference reinforces the Maldives commitment to safeguarding its maritime domain while contributing constructively to regional and global maritime security efforts.

As the Maldives Maritime Conference convenes its second session, it continues to evolve as more than an annual event. It stands as strategic platform for dialogue, learning, and collaboration, supporting the Maldives ambition to build a secure, resilient, and future-ready maritime sector. In a nation where the ocean shapes both daily life and long-term destiny, MMC serves as a reminder that securing the seas today is essential to safeguarding the future for generations to come.

AUTHOR

Maisa Ibrahim Naeem is a marketing and communications professional with an MBA and over a decade of experience across diverse sectors. Her work spans strategic marketing, branding, public relations, and stakeholder engagement, with a focus on translating complex ideas into clear and purposeful communication. She has led initiatives across corporate, public sector, and development-oriented projects, supporting organisational visibility, credibility, and long-term strategic goals. She brings a practical, insight-driven approach to communication that aligns strategy with real-world impact.







Navigating Maldives' Ports Security:

Maritime Critical Infrastructure, Transnational Crimes & Regional Diplomacy



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Introduction

Maritime security is the cornerstone of national security for archipelagic states like Maldives, where the ocean is both a lifeline and a vulnerability. Ports and associated facilities constitute an integral part of maritime critical infrastructure, enabling trade, tourism, and connectivity across dispersed islands. Maldives, to use the Pacific scholar Hau'ofa's term, is a "sea of islands" (Hau'ofa, 1994), comprising 1,190 low-lying islands, depends heavily on maritime routes for economic survival, making its ports indispensable yet inherently fragile objects of the broader critical infrastructures of its islands and sea.

Maritime threats transcend national and regional territories. This article argues that the vulnerability of port infrastructure in Maldives, caused by transnational crimes, is first and foremost amplified by climate impacts – i.e., climate change inherently acts as a ‘threat multiplier’ for maritime protection. However, rising sea levels, storm surges, and coastal inundation are one side of the threat calculus. Domestic critical infrastructure is affected by the security of shipping and port facilities abroad and vice versa, increasing the complexities of port protection strategies. This underscores the need for integrated port protection strategies at the local, national and regional levels.

Christian Bueger & Tobias Liebetrau (2023), leading scholars at the University of Copenhagen, argued in their 2023 research that maritime security must be understood as a comprehensive agenda encompassing not only traditional naval concerns but also the protection of critical maritime infrastructures in an era of increasing industrialisation and urbanisation of the seas. Safeguarding ports and related facilities requires bridging security, environmental governance, and regional cooperation frameworks. For Maldives, regional partnerships – i.e., through bilateral and regional mechanisms, such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) – are not optional but are a strategic imperative for responding to transnational threats to national ports. Port protection becomes an integral part of a bigger global maritime security campaign.

Framing Maldives’ Critical Infrastructure

Port security in Maldives cannot be understood in isolation; it is embedded within a broader system of maritime infrastructures shaped by geography and global connectivity. Historically, ports and international shipping were the dominant objects defining maritime critical infrastructure. Over time, technological advances in shipping and communications have expanded this concept to include sea lanes, subsea cables, and energy transport systems, making the protection of these objects indispensable for societal sustainability and national security. These infrastructures are not confined within national boundaries – i.e., their vulnerabilities and threats are inherently transnational. Maldives exemplifies this complexity. While its islands do

not host big military or deep-water commercial harbours, the nation sits astride critical shipping lanes in the Indian Ocean, including routes that connect the Strait of Hormuz to the Strait of Malacca. Approximately 40 per cent of global oil shipments and a significant share of containerised trade transit through these waters (Ananthavinayagan, Shaheed, Siddiqui, & Imran, 2024). The 8° Channel underscores this strategic positioning, linking Maldives to chokepoints such as Bab-el-Mandeb and the Strait of Hormuz. Consequently, any disruption in these routes – whether from piracy, terrorism, or geopolitical conflict – has cascading effects on Maldives’ security and economy.

Maldives’ port infrastructure is modest but vital. The four main ports – Malé Commercial Harbour, Hulhumalé International Terminal, Kulhudhuffushi Regional Port, and Hithadhoo Regional Port – serve as lifelines for imports, tourism, and inter-island connectivity (Maldives Ports Limited, 2025). Protecting these facilities requires navigating a complex threat matrix that includes illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, drug trafficking, arms smuggling, and maritime terrorism. These threats originate beyond Maldives’ territorial waters, reinforcing Bueger’s and Liebetrau’s (2023) argument that maritime security governance must transcend national jurisdictions and rely on regional cooperation and diplomacy.

Maldives’ geographic vulnerability – its dispersed, low-lying islands – compounds the challenge. Thus, port security is inseparable from planning sustainability measures. As Bueger and Liebetrau emphasise, the quality of port protection is closely linked to the quality of regional cooperation and diplomatic engagement. For Maldives, this means leveraging India-Maldives maritime cooperation and participating in the IORA dialogue, to extending like-minded partnerships with Australia. Port protection is inseparable from regional maritime security campaigns, and Australia’s gifting of the Guardian Class Patrol Boat to Maldives adds weight to the integrated strategies between the two countries. Hence, framing Maldives’ critical infrastructure requires situating ports at the centre of global maritime security policy and operations.

Complexity of Providing Port Security at Sea

Port security encompasses protecting a constellation of interconnected systems such as shipping, energy, communications, fishing, and biodiversity. This multidimensional framing reveals that each maritime node is influenced by global linkages. For example, the ports of Marseille–Fos are deeply integrated with transit through the Suez Canal to the Indian Ocean. Disruptions anywhere along this chain echo upstream and downstream, amplifying local vulnerability by exposing ports to risks that originate far beyond their immediate environment.

The Port of Marseille Fos, France’s largest seaport, is a cornerstone of European maritime critical infrastructure, handling nearly 10,000 ships annually and over 79 million tonnes of goods (Maritime Cybersecurity, 2020). It hosts diverse activities, including container traffic, oil and LNG terminals, bulk cargo, passenger services, ship repair, and logistics zones. Also, it serves as a major landing site for submarine cables connecting Europe with Africa, Asia, and the Gulf. This dual role in commerce and digital connectivity makes Marseille a strategic hub for trade, energy, and communication flows across continents. In March 2020, the port and the wider Aix-Marseille-Provence metropolis were struck by the Mespinoza/Pysa ransomware, which

compromised municipal and administrative systems, forcing isolation of networks and reliance on backups (M-CERT, 2020). Although operational port systems were spared, the incident underscored the vulnerability of interconnected infrastructures where municipal, corporate, and maritime systems overlap.

The attack raised regional and transnational threat perceptions, as disruption at Marseille Port could cascade across supply chains, energy flows, and submarine cable communications linking Europe to the Middle East and Africa (DFIR Report, 2020). It demonstrated that cyber incidents at ports are not isolated problems but strategic security challenges with implications for resilience, commerce, and trust. French cybersecurity authorities (ANSSI) and maritime CERTs emphasised the need for stronger monitoring, patching, and cross-sector collaboration, while global studies of port cyberattacks highlight ransomware as the most common threat, often driven by ransom demands or disruption motives. The Marseille case thus illustrates how cyber threats transcend local boundaries, compelling agencies, companies, and security providers to adopt comprehensive disaster management plans covering preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation. Marseille embodies both the opportunities and vulnerabilities of modern maritime hubs, where commerce, cables, and critical infrastructure converge.



Photo: Skyros Maldives



Photo: Freepik

For Maldives, maritime challenges are heightened by its geography. Ports are situated on low-lying islands, increasing their susceptibility to natural disasters and external shocks. While approximately 90,000 ships transit the Indian Ocean, vessels carrying 10 billion tons of cargo and over 36 barrels of oil transit each day. Maldives reportedly accommodates about 100 of these vessels at its ports each day. Any major disruption – whether from environmental damage or transnational threats – could erode confidence in Maldivian ports as secure nodes within the broader Indian Ocean shipping network.

Robust port security also serves to uphold freedom of navigation – both legal and illicit. Although drug trafficking, piracy, and arms smuggling rarely originate in Maldivian waters, their transit through the region is significant. Smugglers exploit gaps in port security and coordination, highlighting the need for effective local response mechanisms. Additionally, international legal instruments, like the International Ship and Port Facility (ISPS) Code and International Maritime Organisation (IMO) drug-prevention guidelines, obligate port facilities to counter illicit maritime crime through structured procedures.

This dual mandate, including managing natural and man-made risks, tests the capacity of Maldives' maritime institutions. Transnational threats exploit weak links in infrastructure, enforcement, and cooperation, and hence, ensuring the quality of regional diplomacy, governance, and sustained training and information-sharing is imperative.

Regional Diplomacy as a Security Strategy

Historically, limited capacity in small states like Maldives was associated with dependency rather than strategic engagement. However, post-Cold War transformations in security narratives – i.e., the expansion of global trade and the rise of liberal institutions promoting sustainable development and climate adaptation, shaping new norms of bilateral and regional cooperation – have shifted priorities toward protecting non-military targets such as economic markets and critical infrastructure (Rasheed, 2025). This evolution integrated small states' interests, through their agency, into regional security architectures, emphasising resilience and cooperative governance.

For Maldives, navigating the maritime domain is inseparable from the quality of its diplomatic partnerships. Its agency-shaping regional dialogue began in the 1980s when dealing with international climate negotiations. As one of the first states to navigate island vulnerabilities to climate change and drive international negotiations to consider the special case of small island states, Maldives has illustrated an important aspect of small power and agency in shaping regional security campaigns. While climate adaptation campaigns were focused on the sustainable development agenda, the subsequent incorporation of climate threats into the United Nations Security Council's debates has given weight to the ideational and constitutive nature of small state agency in shaping bilateral and regional engagements in security discourse.

Maldives smallness is not only a vulnerability, but it has also been a resource for navigating national and regional security campaigns. The narratives on climate-induced disasters at sea have been translated into stories concerning maritime-related threats. For example, the bad weather at sea impacts the Coast Guard's capabilities to operate effectively at sea on rescue missions. This is a narrative that takes climate-narrative beyond development-based adaptation; rather, it is directly linked to defence and security activity.

Any impact on the Coast Guard's capacity can have significant implications for the regional security setup – i.e., it shows how important it is to view the global critical infrastructure through its connections with Maldives' maritime domain.

Maldives can help shape regional security interests and incorporate integrated strategies into the regional framework on port protection. Therefore, regional cooperation becomes a cornerstone of national security policy, reflecting the practical realities of port security at both local and macro levels. For example, initiatives such as the DOSTI trilateral Coast Guard exercise between Maldives, India and Sri Lanka exemplify this approach, reinforcing interoperability and trust among regional actors. These engagements demonstrate that diplomacy is not merely a political instrument but a functional component of maritime security and defence strategies – enhancing surveillance, crisis response, and capacity-building.

Maldives' participation in the IORA represents a strategy of multilateralism and regional cooperation. Maldives supports regional efforts to tackle shared challenges, including maritime security threats, climate change, and IUU fishing activities that traverse regional territories (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025). The IORA platform can help to amplify Maldives' voice in shaping regional security agendas and accessing technical, diplomatic, and capacity-building support from larger partners. IORA is not merely about a dependency platform for Maldives; it instigates agency for Maldives to shape the security architecture of the Indian Ocean (Rasheed, 2023). For example, Maldives' commitment to IORA's Working Group on Maritime Safety and Security highlights its role in the regional theatres.

Australia's approach within IORA also aligns closely with Maldivian priorities, centring on upholding the rule of law at sea, enhancing maritime domain awareness, and advancing resilient port infrastructure – i.e., Australia's defence and security posture extends beyond its northern border activities into direct engagements with the Indian Ocean maritime states. Australia's engagement in the region is characterised by practical support, including the provision to Maldives of the Guardian Class Patrol Boat and increasing technical assistance and maritime protection upgrades. The convergence of Maldivian and Australian interests is further reflected in joint exercises, capacity-building workshops, and the promotion of the ISPS Code. These are building mutual policy platforms to support maritime interoperability between the two states.

Ultimately, Maldives' ability to safeguard its ports and maritime domain depends on sustained investment in regional diplomacy and multilateral frameworks. This starts with defence diplomacy with India and like-minded countries like Australia. For small states, this is not optional but an existential requirement: resilience at sea begins with partnerships on land.

Conclusion

This article has underscored the intricate and multidimensional nature of maritime security in Maldives, situating port protection within a wider global and regional framework. The vulnerability of Maldivian port infrastructure is not only a consequence of traditional threats such as piracy, terrorism, and smuggling, but is also amplified by climate change, which acts as a 'threat multiplier'. The interconnectedness of domestic and international critical infrastructures means that disruptions in one locale can have cascading effects elsewhere, making the task of safeguarding ports both a national and transnational challenge.

The concept of critical maritime infrastructure has evolved beyond ports and shipping to encompass sea lanes, subsea cables, and energy transport systems, all of which are vital for societal sustainability and security. For Maldives, despite the modest scale of its port facilities, its strategic location on key Indian Ocean shipping routes magnifies its significance. Any disruption along these routes can resonate through the nation's economy and security architecture, affecting not only local but also regional and global interests.

A key analytical insight is the critical role of regional diplomacy in enhancing port security. The article demonstrates how Maldives, despite its size and perceived vulnerability, wields agency through active participation in regional dialogues and security frameworks. Initiatives such as the DOSTI trilateral Coast Guard exercise and engagement with organisations like the IORA exemplify how small states can leverage partnerships to bolster their security. Maldives' experience reveals that resilience is not solely a function of domestic capability, but is equally dependent on the quality of regional cooperation, diplomatic engagement, and adherence to international legal instruments such as the ISPS Code.

Safeguarding Maldivian ports is inseparable from broader efforts to strengthen regional maritime security. The interplay between climate change, transnational threats, and the necessity for multilateral cooperation places a premium on adaptive, integrated strategies. Maldives' proactive engagement in regional security dialogues and its ability to translate vulnerability into agency provide a model for other small states facing similar challenges. Ultimately, the future of port security in Maldives – and by extension, the Indian Ocean region – rests on sustained investment in diplomacy, resilience planning, and the continuous evolution of governance frameworks to keep pace with an increasingly complex maritime environment.

AUTHOR

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Rethinking Maldives Maritime Security Beyond Dependency: Explained through the Metaphor of ‘Caged Bird’



Lt. Col. Ahmed Jameel
Commanding officer Coast Guard Ship Dharumavantha
Maldives National Defence Force

Introduction

“A bird kept in a cage says it can never fly – it can never fly unless it is allowed to try.”

Maldives, a chain of 1192 small islands scattered across the vast Indian Ocean, often finds itself in this position – ie a small bird surrounded by great powers, sheltered by others’ wings yet uncertain of its own. While its maritime domain is expansive and strategically vital, the country’s security remains heavily reliant on foreign aid.

This dependence ensures stability but also raises profound questions of sovereignty. Maldives can never achieve true maritime autonomy if it never learns to “fly” – to protect its waters, oversee its territory, and handle its defence using national resources according to its own requirements.

Maritime cooperation - The comfort of the Cage

Foreign cooperation has been a blessing in many ways. For example, India's role in assisting the Maldives during the 1988 coup attempt, for instance, remains a defining moment in the two countries' relationship. Since then, Indian assistance has expanded to include combined exercises, joint patrols, hydrographic surveys, and radar systems that form part of India's broader maritime security network across the Indian Ocean. India also operates two helicopters and one Dornier aircraft in Maldives to assist MNDF Coast Guard in maritime Search and Rescue (SAR).

Such cooperation offers tangible benefits: enhanced deterrence against transnational crimes and also cost effectiveness i.e Maldives spends less on maritime security. For a small island nation with limited resources, this arrangement provides a sense of security that would otherwise be impossible to afford.

Yet, every cage offers comfort, the longer a bird stays inside, the less it remembers what flight/freedom feels like. Similarly, the longer the Maldives relies on foreign aid for ensuring its maritime security, the more its ability to act independently is at risk. Dependence can create strategic inertia – a belief that self-reliance is unnecessary, even impossible.

This is not a unique challenge for the Maldives. Many small states in the Indian Ocean, such as Seychelles and Mauritius, face similar dilemmas: balancing the need for security assistance with the desire for sovereignty. But the Maldivian case is particularly delicate, because domestic politics often amplify the perception that foreign military presence undermines independence – turning cooperation into controversy.

Testing the Wings: Toward Maritime Self-Reliance

To "fly," the Maldives does not need to reject partnership. Rather, it must redefine dependence as cooperation – where foreign assistance serves as a stepping stone to capability, not a substitute for it. The following can be a start;

1. Development of Domestic Naval/Maritime Infrastructure

To strengthen the operational readiness and autonomy of the MNDF Coast Guard, it is required that the government invest in the construction of locally manufactured maritime vessels and the establishment of domestic repair and maintenance facilities. For example, even now, the Maldives Coast Guard relies on vessels manufactured by Gulf Craft, a local company. While these boats represent an important step toward domestic production and maritime self-sufficiency, they are primarily suited for near-shore operations (due to smaller size and less endurance). The Coast Guard still lacks high-endurance patrol vessels made in Maldives, capable of withstanding rough seas or conducting long-range missions across its vast Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

These facilities would not only support the upkeep and expansion of the MNDF fleet but could also serve the commercial maritime sector. Given the Maldives' identity as a maritime nation, this initiative would foster local industry, create employment opportunities, and contribute positively to the national economy.

2. Expansion of Maritime Aviation Capabilities

To enhance the MNDF's aerial operational capacity, it is required to procure both fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft. Although the MNDF has trained pilots, the absence of dedicated aircraft has necessitated the use of commercial Maldivian aircraft for training purposes. The acquisition of military aviation assets would significantly improve the MNDF's ability to conduct critical missions such as SAR, medical evacuations, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) operations. Reducing reliance on external actors for these functions will minimize operational delays and ensure the confidentiality and sovereignty of national security operations.

3. Advancing Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)

To strengthen surveillance and oversight of its vast maritime territory, the Maldives should prioritize the deployment of a low-Earth orbit (LEO) satellite. This would markedly improve real-time monitoring capabilities. As a long-term objective, the development of a geosynchronous orbit (GEO) satellite should also be pursued to further enhance national maritime intelligence infrastructure.

In addition, the Maldives can invest in indigenous information-sharing platforms. Currently, the MNDF Coast Guard relies heavily on foreign systems such as SeaVision (United States) and IORIS (European Union). However, there is untapped potential within the local tech community to develop homegrown solutions. A notable example is the “Follow Me” application, widely adopted by Maldivians to track commercial vessels operating within national waters.

4. Regional Collaboration Among Small Island States

To reduce dependency on major powers and promote collective security, the Maldives should explore the formation of a cooperative maritime security network with fellow island nations such as Mauritius, Seychelles, and Sri Lanka. This “Minilateral Security cooperation” within the Indian Ocean region would facilitate cost-sharing, joint surveillance, and streamlined information sharing and exchange, reinforcing regional resilience and autonomy.

However, true self-reliance will not entail turning away from likeminded partners like India or the U.S. It means engaging on equal terms – as an independent actor whose security is shaped by choice, not necessity. If Maldives becomes more self-reliant, it will acquire greater leverage as well. It will be able to manage its ties with all the major powers such as India, China and the United States better, acquiring greater hedging abilities.

Photo: Maldives National Defence Force



Navigating strategic partnership

The Indian Ocean is often described as a “theatre of competition” between major powers — India, China, the U.S., and others. For the Maldives, this reality makes neutrality difficult. Every offer of assistance carries geopolitical implications. A donated patrol boat may symbolize friendship for some, but it also represents influence for the others.

Thus, for the Maldives, maritime security is not merely about defending borders; it is about preserving strategic freedom. The challenge lies in ensuring that foreign cooperation empowers rather than entraps. A well-intentioned partnership/alliance can become a golden cage — secure but confining — if it limits a nation’s ability to act independently.

Strategic Autonomy in the Indian Ocean

The path ahead requires a careful blend of pragmatism and ambition. The Maldives cannot — and need not — achieve complete independence in maritime defense. The scale of its territory and economy makes that unrealistic. However, it can cultivate strategic autonomy: the capacity to make sovereign decisions about its security partnerships, grounded in its own priorities and capabilities.

To do so, the Maldives must treat current dependencies as opportunities for learning. Every combined exercise, joint patrol, every training mission, every example of technology transfer should be seen as a way to strengthen its wings — not reinforce the bars of the cage.

Conclusion

The caged bird metaphor is not one of rebellion, but of realization. The bird does not resent the cage; it simply recognizes that its nature is to fly. The Maldives, too, must one day move from dependency to capability enhancement and capacity building — not by rejecting its partners or allies, but by discovering its own strength within those relationships.

Dependence offers protection, but it also breeds fragility. Sovereignty, like flight, requires risk — the courage to leave the comfort of the cage and test one’s own wings. For the Maldives, the future of maritime security will depend not on how tightly it clings to external protectors, but on how confidently it learns to navigate the open sky above the Indian Ocean.

AUTHOR

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Photo: Maldives National Defence Force



Transforming Trade: Tradian in Action



Moonis Muneez
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Photo: Freepik

Tradian, the Maldives' National Single Window for trade, was introduced to bring together and streamline the services offered by Cross-Border Regulatory Authorities (CBRAs).

Its launch represents a significant step forward in the nation's trade modernisation efforts by reducing complexity of service application, enhancing transparency of service processing, and supporting smooth connectivity with single window systems across the region and beyond. By bringing multiple services into one digital platform, Tradian offers traders, businesses, and government agencies a straightforward and efficient access point for handling import, export, and transit processes. Following extensive testing, user consultations, awareness efforts, and training

initiatives, Tradian officially went live on 20 April 2025 with sea-based import and export services. All services under Tradian Phase I were fully shifted to the platform on 21 September 2025. Since then, usage and the platform's influence within the local trade ecosystem have continued to grow.

This article looks back at Tradian's journey so far and the changes it has brought to the trade sector in the Maldives.

Why Tradian?

Tradian was introduced to tackle inefficiencies at the border that slow down cross-border trade. By bringing multiple trade transactions onto a single platform, Tradian streamlines processes, reduces transaction times, and lowers costs. It also improves accuracy by minimizing repetitive data entry and enhances transparency, giving all stakeholders real-time access to trade information.

Beyond efficiency, Tradian strengthens the Maldives' alignment with international standards. Its implementation supports compliance with the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and the IMO FAL Convention, which were created to streamline and standardise the documentation and procedures for vessels entering and leaving ports globally.

Tradian also eliminates system fragmentation to create a more predictable and user-friendly trade environment. Meeting the requirements of the IMO FAL Convention is more than a regulatory achievement; it reflects the Maldives' commitment to embracing a new era of digital trade.

Tradian in Numbers

Since launch, Tradian has seen consistent engagement from the trade community:

Registrations

- Importers & Exporters: 10
- Freight Forwarders: 112
- Shipping Agents: 76
- Vessel Registrations: 107

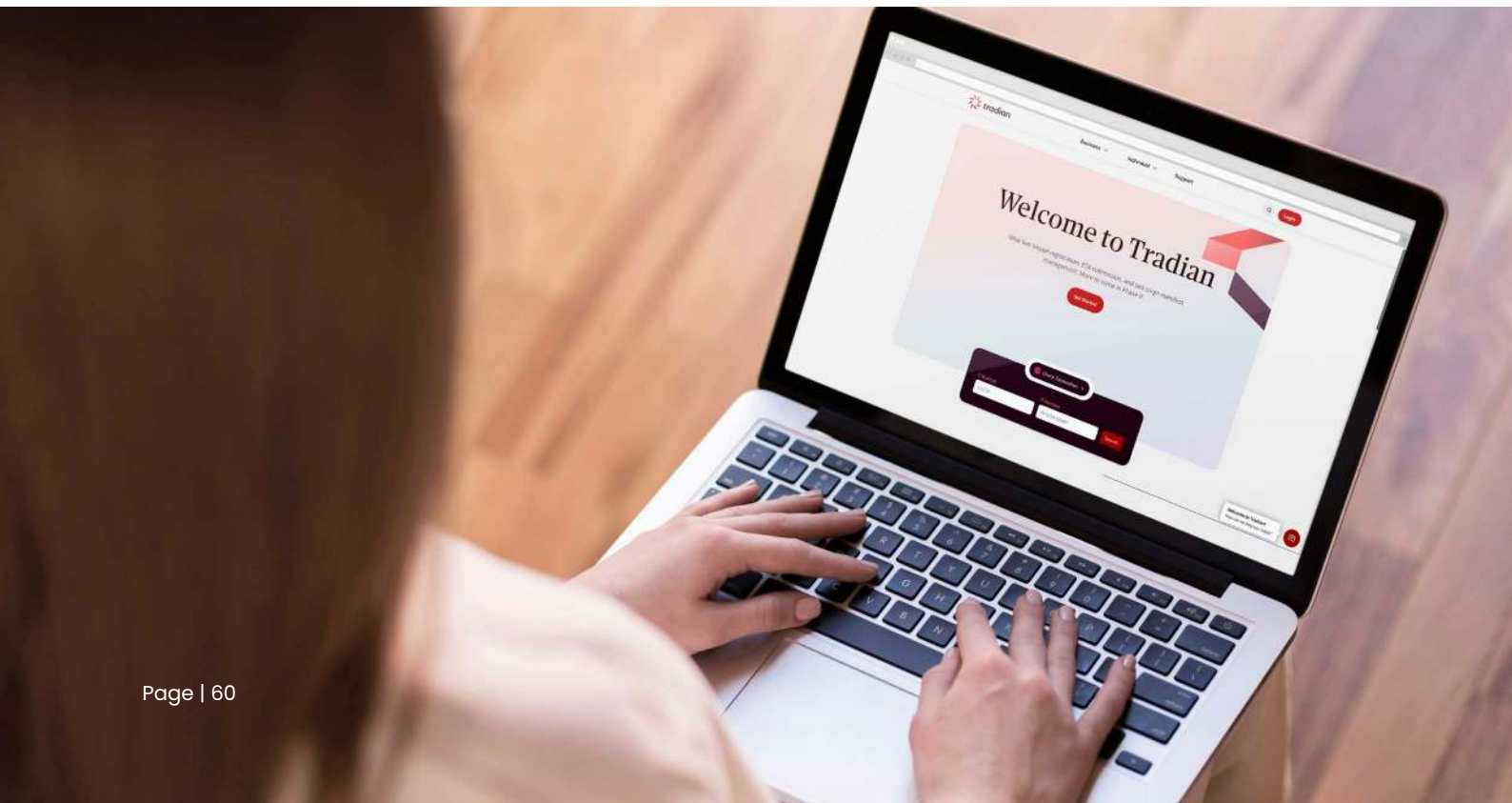
Submissions

- ETA/ETD: 372
- Bills of Lading (BL): 14,000+

Training Programmes

- CBRA training sessions: 17 sessions with over 250 participants
- Private-sector sessions: 23 sessions with more than 290 participants

These numbers underscore the platform's adoption and the strong efforts made to support stakeholders during the rollout.





Trade in a Digital-First Nation

The digitalisation of trade processes through Trian is also part of His Excellency President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu's wider national digitalisation strategy, Maldives 2.0.

Trian's contribution to this effort is through the modernisation of trade processes, making import, export, and transit activities more efficient, transparent, and easier to manage for businesses and regulatory authorities alike. Trian also aims to make trade more accessible to the average citizen.

By digitalising trade procedures, Trian helps the Maldives enhance its competitiveness on the global stage. The platform enables smoother cross-border transactions, aligns with international standards, and positions the country as a more attractive and reliable trading partner.

Trian exemplifies how Maldives 2.0 leverages digital solutions to address age-old problems while contributing to the country's wider digital transformation

As Trian continues to grow, the platform remains focused on broadening its capabilities, enhancing the user experience, and strengthening the Maldives' integration within global trade networks.

The launch of the Vessel Declaration service is expected once testing and stakeholder preparations conclude, and the gradual rollout of Phase II will introduce additional services and sectors into the Trian framework.

Alongside these developments, continuous training and capacity-building efforts will help traders and agencies make full use of the system. Trian's ongoing coordination with government bodies, port authorities, and the private sector ensures the transition is efficient, secure, and sustainable.

Trian is more than a technological enhancement. It represents a fundamental shift in the way the Maldives manages trade, driving greater efficiency, compliance, and cooperation across the country's key trade environment.

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Ports by Practice, Not by Law: Why The Maldives Needs A Ports Act



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Ports are where policy becomes physical. Trade, investment, labor, and sovereignty converge at the quay wall, and what appears to be steel and concrete is, in fact, a dense bundle of legal authority, economic coordination, and public accountability. In the Maldives, ports already perform this function in practice. Cargo moves, vessels berth, revenues are collected, safety rules are enforced, and investments are negotiated daily. What is missing is not activity, but architecture. The country operates its ports through a mosaic of statutes, regulations, executive instruments, and corporate mandates that were never designed to function as a single system. That fragmentation now constrains what the Maldives can build, finance, regulate, and ultimately sustain.

A Ports Act is no longer a matter of institutional tidiness. It has become an economic necessity.

A system that works, but only by improvisation

The absence of a dedicated ports law has not prevented the sector from functioning. It has, however, forced it to function through improvisation. Authority over ports is dispersed across general maritime legislation, customs regimes, environmental rules, public finance laws, company law, and bespoke contractual arrangements. Each instrument addresses a specific concern. None provides a sector-wide logic. Together, they create a system that works only through constant administrative coordination and institutional goodwill.

That improvisation carries costs. Investors confront uncertainty over tenure, tariff authority, step-in rights, and asset reversion. Regulators operate without a clear statutory demarcation between ownership, policymaking, and oversight. Operators are asked to deliver public service obligations without a legal framework that defines how such obligations are funded or compensated. Meanwhile, the state absorbs fiscal and legal risks that are rarely explicit and even less often priced.

In an archipelagic economy, these weaknesses are magnified. Ports are not peripheral infrastructure in the Maldives, they are the backbone of economic life. Every imported good, every construction material, every essential input to tourism, energy, and food security passes through them. Ports shape the cost of living as surely as they shape trade statistics. Yet they continue to be treated, in law, as an extension of maritime administration or as assets managed through corporate mandates, rather than as a regulated economic sector in their own right.

Modern ports are no longer passive interfaces between sea and land. They are logistics platforms, energy nodes, data hubs, and industrial catalysts. They coordinate multiple actors, public and private, domestic and international, across long asset lives and volatile trade cycles. This reality demands sector-specific regulation. A Ports Act would formally recognise ports as strategic national assets while allowing for differentiated models of ownership and operation. It would establish ports as a system governed by principle, not merely as facilities governed by precedent.

Legal ambiguity is not neutral. Where the law is silent or fragmented, risk does not disappear, it migrates. In the Maldivian context, it migrates primarily onto the public balance sheet. When concession agreements are negotiated

without a statutory backbone, fundamental questions such as tariff-setting authority, exclusivity, performance obligations, and termination regimes must be resolved afresh each time. This inflates transaction costs, weakens the state's bargaining position, and embeds inconsistency into long-term contracts.

The consequences extend beyond finance. Regulatory decisions taken without a clear legislative mandate are more vulnerable to challenge, reinterpretation, or reversal. This discourages long-term investment and encourages short-term optimisation. Ports, however, are built for decades. They require patient capital, predictable rules, and credible enforcement. A Ports Act supplies that credibility by anchoring authority in statute rather than in administrative practice alone.



Photo: Freepik

From infrastructure to institution

The question of private participation illustrates why law matters. The Maldives, like many small economies, faces a structural dilemma. Port infrastructure is capitalintensive and technically demanding. Public resources are finite. Private capital is available, but only where legal clarity allows risk to be allocated rationally. In the absence of a ports law, each public–private partnership becomes a bespoke experiment. With one, partnerships become instruments of policy.

A Ports Act does not mandate privatisation. It allows the state to choose, deliberately and transparently, where private participation is appropriate and where it is not. It can define permissible models, landlord ports, service ports, or hybrid arrangements, and the conditions under which each may operate. More importantly, it can ringfence public interests. Statutory tariff principles, service standards, and concession oversight mechanisms ensure that private efficiency does not come at the expense of national access, labour protections, or fiscal stability.

Financing is another area where law and economics intersect. Ports are financed over long horizons. Their revenues fluctuate with trade cycles, fuel prices, and geopolitical shocks. Without a clear statutory framework, port revenues, guarantees, and contingent liabilities are often managed in ways that obscure risk. A Ports Act can embed financial discipline by clarifying how port revenues are treated, when state support may be extended, and under what conditions guarantees may be issued.

This matters for debt sustainability. Offbalancesheet arrangements and opaque financing structures may accelerate project delivery in the short term, but they accumulate risk over time. A clear legislative regime allows contingent liabilities to be identified, priced, and managed. It also lowers the cost of capital by providing lenders with certainty regarding security interests, stepin rights, and revenue assignment.

Regulation, when done well, is not about control for its own sake. It is about signaling commitment. A predictable regulator, operating under a clear statutory mandate, reassures investors, operators, and users alike. A Ports Act can clarify where regulatory authority sits, how tariffs are approved, how disputes are resolved, and how compliance is enforced. In a small economy, where roles often overlap out of necessity, such clarity protects institutions as much as it disciplines them.

Environmental and social considerations must also be brought into the core of port governance. Ports are environmental actors. Dredging, reclamation, vessel emissions, and waste management impose real ecological costs. Treating these impacts as external constraints rather than integral obligations weakens enforcement and undermines credibility. A Ports Act integrates environmental duties directly into the legal architecture of port development.

Ports are also workplaces. Safety standards, training obligations, and workforce transitions cannot be left to contract alone. Embedding social obligations in statute ensures that commercial efficiency and human security advance together rather than in tension.

The Moment Law Must Catch Up

What exists today is a port system held together by administrative competence and institutional effort. That is not a substitute for law. The Maldives has reached a point where incremental adjustments are no longer sufficient. Trade volumes are rising, regional competition is intensifying, and the demands placed on port infrastructure are becoming more complex. Delay carries opportunity costs. It also compounds risk.

Legislation is often portrayed as reactive, a response to crisis. In this case, it should be preemptive. A Ports Act would not replace existing laws. It would align them. It would provide a reference point against which regulations, contracts, and policies can be measured. It would transform ports from a series of negotiated outcomes into an intentional sector.

Ports, by their nature, lock in decisions for generations. The law that governs them should be no less durable. A Ports Act is not about asserting control for its own sake. It is about giving structure to what already exists, clarity to what is already practiced, and confidence to what must still be built. In doing so, it anchors the country's economic future to a framework that is coherent, credible, and fit for purpose.

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Rebuilding Port Expertise Through UNCTAD Modern Port Management Programme



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Photo: Maldives Ports Limited



After more than a decade-long hiatus, the UNCTAD Modern Port Management Programme resumed in the Maldives with renewed purpose, marking a renewed commitment to strengthening port leadership, operational understanding, and strategic thinking in a nation where maritime connectivity underpins daily life. The successful completion of Maldives Cycle 3 stands not only as an academic achievement, but as a testament to institutional commitment, professional resilience, and the growing importance of modern port management in Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

Delivered in collaboration with UNCTAD TrainForTrade and facilitated locally by Maldives Ports Limited (MPL), the program brought together a cohort of dedicated maritime professionals who balanced their academic demands alongside their operational responsibilities. From commencing after a long pause to reaching successful completion, the programme stands as a milestone in national capacity development for the maritime sector.

From Pause to Progress: Bringing the Modern Port Management Programme Back

The UNCTAD Modern Port Management Programme was last conducted in the Maldives, more than 12 years ago. Its revival in 2024 was driven by a growing recognition that ports today face far more complex challenges than before, ranging from congestion and spatial limitations to digitalization, sustainability, and evolving stakeholder expectations.

For an island national entirely dependent on maritime transport for trade, food security, fuel supply, and economic continuity, strengthening port management skills is critical. The return of the programme reflected a shared understanding that resilient ports are built not only through infrastructure investment, but through people equipped with the right knowledge and perspectives.

Maldives Cycle 3 commenced with 20 staff, majority of whom were staff of Maldives Ports Limited, representing a wide range of operational, technical, planning, and management functions. Their participation reinforced MPL's long-term focus on developing internal talent and future leaders for the port sector.

Importance of Port Knowledge in an Island Nation

Ports in the Maldives are more than points of cargo transfer, they are lifelines connecting to islands, sustaining livelihoods, and supporting national development. As trade volumes grow, and urban pressures intensify; ports must operate efficiently while remaining safe, secure, and environmentally responsible.

The UNCTAD Modern Port Management Programme provided participants with the tools to better understand this broader role of ports, encouraging them to see beyond individual tasks and recognize how decisions made at operational level influence national supply chains and economic resilience.



Photo: Maldives Ports Limited



Photo: Maldives Ports Limited

One Shared Journey Across Eight Interesting Modules

The Modern Port Management Programme is structured around eight interconnected modules, each designed to build progressively on the previous one. Together, they offer a comprehensive overview of modern port systems and management practices.

The modules completed under the programme are:

1. International Trade and Maritime Transport

2. The Organization of a Port System

3. The Functioning of a Port System

4. Challenges of Sustainable Ports

5. Methods and Tools of Port Management

6. Commercial and Economic Management

7. Administrative and Legal Management of Ports

8. Technical Management and Human Resource Development

Each module blended theory with case studies and discussions, encouraging participants to critically analyze how international best practices could be adapted to the Maldivian context.

Lessons Beyond the Classroom

One of the defining strengths of the UNCTAD Modern Port Management Programme was its strong emphasis on applied learning. Participants were not merely assessed on their ability to recall concepts and theories, but on how effectively they could analyze problems, propose solutions, and link operational challenges with strategic thinking.

Throughout the programme, participants reported gaining:

For many participants, the programme also fostered a shift in mindset from viewing challenges in isolation to understanding ports as interconnected systems influenced by policy, planning, people, and infrastructure.

Research at The Core: The Dissertation Component

A key requirement of the UNCTAD Modern Port Management Programme is the completion of a research-based dissertation, allowing participants to explore real-world issues relevant to their organization or national port systems.

The dissertation submitted under Maldives Cycle 3 covered a wide range of critical topics including port congestion, digitalization, data management, operational efficiency, and strategic development. These research projects not only demonstrated academic competence but also generated practical insights with direct relevance to MPL's operations and future planning.

Among the submissions, the Best Dissertation Award was presented to Hussain Jaufar, Assistant Planner at Maldives Ports Limited, for his research titled "Exploring the Challenges at MPL Due to Port Congestion". His study examined port congestion not as a temporary operational issue, but as a structural challenge influenced by space limitations, throughput growth, yard planning, and urban constraints. The dissertation was commended for clarity, depth of analysis, and ability to distinguish between challenges that can be resolved through operational improvements and those requiring long-term strategic investment.

Recognizing The Top All-Rounder

The Top All-Rounder Award for Maldives Cycle 3 was presented to the participant who achieved the highest overall average score across all eight modules, successfully completed the dissertation, and defended the research before a jury, meeting all academic and assessment requirements of the programme. This recognition was awarded to Haisam Saeed, Data Analyst at Maldives Ports Limited. Achieving the highest average across all modules while completing and defending a research dissertation reflects the consistent academic excellence, analytical strength, and sustained commitment throughout the programme.

His dissertation titled "Data Challenges, Impacts and Solutions: A Conceptual Framework for Implementing Structured Statistical Systems at Maldives Ports Limited", examined the limitations of fragmented operational data and highlighted the operational and decision-making impacts of inconsistent data structures. The research proposed a structured statistical framework aimed at improving data consistency, reliability, and usability to support planning performance monitoring, and informed decision-making within port operations.

The award underscores the importance of strong analytical capabilities in modern port management and highlights the growing role of data-driven approaches in improving efficiency, transparency, and strategic planning in the maritime sector.

Further recognizing his academic and professional potential, Haisam Saeed was also awarded a scholarship to pursue a Master of Science in Maritime Affairs (Port Management) at the World Maritime University, marking a significant milestone in his professional development and reinforcing the value of the UNCTAD Modern Port Management Programme as a pathway for future maritime leaders.



Photo: Maldives Ports Limited

Photo: Maldives Ports Limited



Building National Capacity Through People

The successful completion of Maldives Cycle 3 reaffirms the value of structured professional development in strengthening national institutions. For Maldives Ports Limited, the programme has contributed to building a more informed, confident, and strategically aware workforce that is capable of supporting the organization’s long-term vision amid growing trade volumes, spatial constraints, and evolving stakeholder expectations.

For the participants, the programme represented more than an academic milestone. It was a journey of personal growth, professional reflection, and shared learning, supported by strong peer networks and guided by international best practices.

The Journey Continues

From its revival after a long hiatus to its successful completion, the UNCTAD Modern Port Management Programme – Maldives Cycle 3 stands as a clear reminder that the strength of a port system lies not only in its infrastructure, but in the knowledge, discipline, and vision of the people who operate it. As the Maldives navigates increasing trade demands, spatial constraints, and a rapidly evolving maritime landscape, programmes such as this play a vital role in shaping professionals who can think beyond immediate challenges and contribute to long-term national resilience.

The achievements of the participants—reflected in academic excellence, practical research, and international recognition—underscore the value of sustained investment in human capital. With strengthened skills, deeper insight, and renewed confidence, the graduates of Maldives Cycle 3 are well positioned to support the continued development of the country’s ports and logistics systems. Their journey does not end with completion; it marks the beginning of a more informed, adaptive, and forward-looking chapter for the Maldivian maritime sector.

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Maisa Ibrahim Naeem is a marketing and communications professional with an MBA and over a decade of experience across diverse sectors. Her work spans strategic marketing, branding, public relations, and stakeholder engagement, with a focus on translating complex ideas into clear and purposeful communication. She has led initiatives across corporate, public sector, and development-oriented projects, supporting organisational visibility, credibility, and long-term strategic goals. She brings a practical, insight-driven approach to communication that aligns strategy with real-world impact.



Sustaining the Spirit of Ramadan:

MPL's Role in Preparing the Nation



Saruvaan Hussain Husnee
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Maldives Ports Limited

Introduction: The Ritual of Renewal

In the Maldives, the arrival of Ramadan is felt long before the crescent moon is sighted. The signs appear instinctively in local homes, marking a shift in the everyday rhythm. Walls are scrubbed and repainted. Old furniture is replaced to create space for hosting family, neighbours, and visitors during shared gatherings. In island courtyards and on doorsteps, families spread clean dhon-veli (clean white sand), a gesture practiced for generations. These acts are not about appearance alone; they reflect a deeply rooted belief that the home, like the heart, must be purified and prepared before the fasting begins.

This ritual of renewal signifies readiness on a spiritual, emotional, and communal level. Homes are arranged to host family and neighbors, while kitchens are reorganized and equipped with new appliances to make the day to day tedious tasks more convenient in preparation of early Suhoor and Iftar.

As a Muslim nation, daily life across the country is collectively reshaped to place greater emphasis on spiritual purpose. Official working hours are adjusted to ease daytime demands, allowing more time for reflection, and worship during the holy month. Within homes, families stock familiar ingredients and plan meals that have defined Maldivian Ramadan tables for centuries. Ramadan, in this sense, is not a pause in daily life but a reorientation of it.

Maahefun: The Communal Transition

One of the most enduring elements of this preparation is Maahefun, a tradition handed down through generations and continued today as a conscious effort to keep a deeply rooted cultural practice alive. This pre-Ramadan gathering sees families, friends, and neighbours come together to share a final celebratory meal before the fasting begins. Traditionally featuring dishes like Kulhi-faaroshi (spicy rusks), dried fish (valhommas), dates, and fresh coconut, these shared feasts represent more than just food.

Passed down through generations, Maahefun reinforces the idea that Ramadan is entered as a community. It marks the transition into the fasting month with collective intention, as mosques prepare for increased worship and neighborhoods anticipate the daily observance of Iftar. Ramadan is not entered abruptly; it is approached gradually through these practices shaped by culture, faith, and communal life.

The Invisible Engine Behind the Tradition

In the Maldives, surrounded by ocean and reliant on imports, even the simplest household preparations depend on goods arriving from elsewhere. The paint and decorations that refresh homes, the appliances that ease daily life, and the ingredients that fill spice racks and pantries do not arrive by chance. They move through carefully coordinated global supply chains before reaching Malé Commercial Harbour.

At the centre of this movement is Maldives Ports Limited (MPL). As the nation prepares for the holy month, our role becomes increasingly vital, supporting the conditions that allow households and communities to observe Ramadan without disruption.



Photo: Maldives Ports Limited
Local Market

Managing the "Ramadan Rush"

As Ramadan approaches, the Maldives experiences a predictable surge in imports. Household essentials and food supplies arrive in higher volumes as families and communities prepare for a month centred on shared meals and hospitality. This seasonal spike, commonly called the "Ramadan Rush," demands careful planning and coordinated effort to ensure goods reach homes and markets on time.

To manage this demand, MPL activates a high-intensity operational framework tailored for the period. The objective is to prevent over congestion at the port that could disrupt supply chains, increase costs, or create shortages in local markets.

Achieving this requires continuous operations, with port teams working 24-hour shifts to maintain steady cargo flow. To further streamline operations, empty containers are managed at the newly established empty container depot at Thilafushi. This strategic move frees up vital yard space and eases congestion at the Malé Commercial Harbour, ensuring supply stability and price consistency when household demand is at its highest.

Food Security: The Perishable Priority

Among all imports, food and perishable items receive the highest priority. During Ramadan, fresh produce plays a central role in daily Iftar meals shared with family and neighbors. Ensuring the availability and freshness of these goods is critical.

MPL facilitates priority clearance for perishable cargo, allowing fruits, vegetables, and other fresh goods to move from vessel to market within hours of arrival. This reduces spoilage and supports stable pricing for consumers.

To address space constraints, MPL also establishes temporary perishable storage facilities in Malé and Hulhumalé during the Ramadan period. These facilities allow importers to manage stocks effectively while maintaining quality standards. By preventing delays and minimizing waste, MPL contributes directly to food security, ensuring that the tradition of sharing Iftar remains accessible across communities.



Photo: Freepik

Modernising Tradition Through Technology

While the cultural practices surrounding Ramadan preparation are centuries old, the systems that support them have evolved. Just as households have adapted their kitchens with modern appliances, port operations have transitioned to technology-enabled systems.

Through the MyBandharu portal, merchants and importers can track cargo movements, monitor clearance status, and plan distribution with greater certainty. This digital transparency reduces delays and allows businesses to focus on meeting community needs during the fasting month. By aligning long-standing traditions with modern logistics, MPL ensures that cultural continuity is supported by resilient infrastructure.

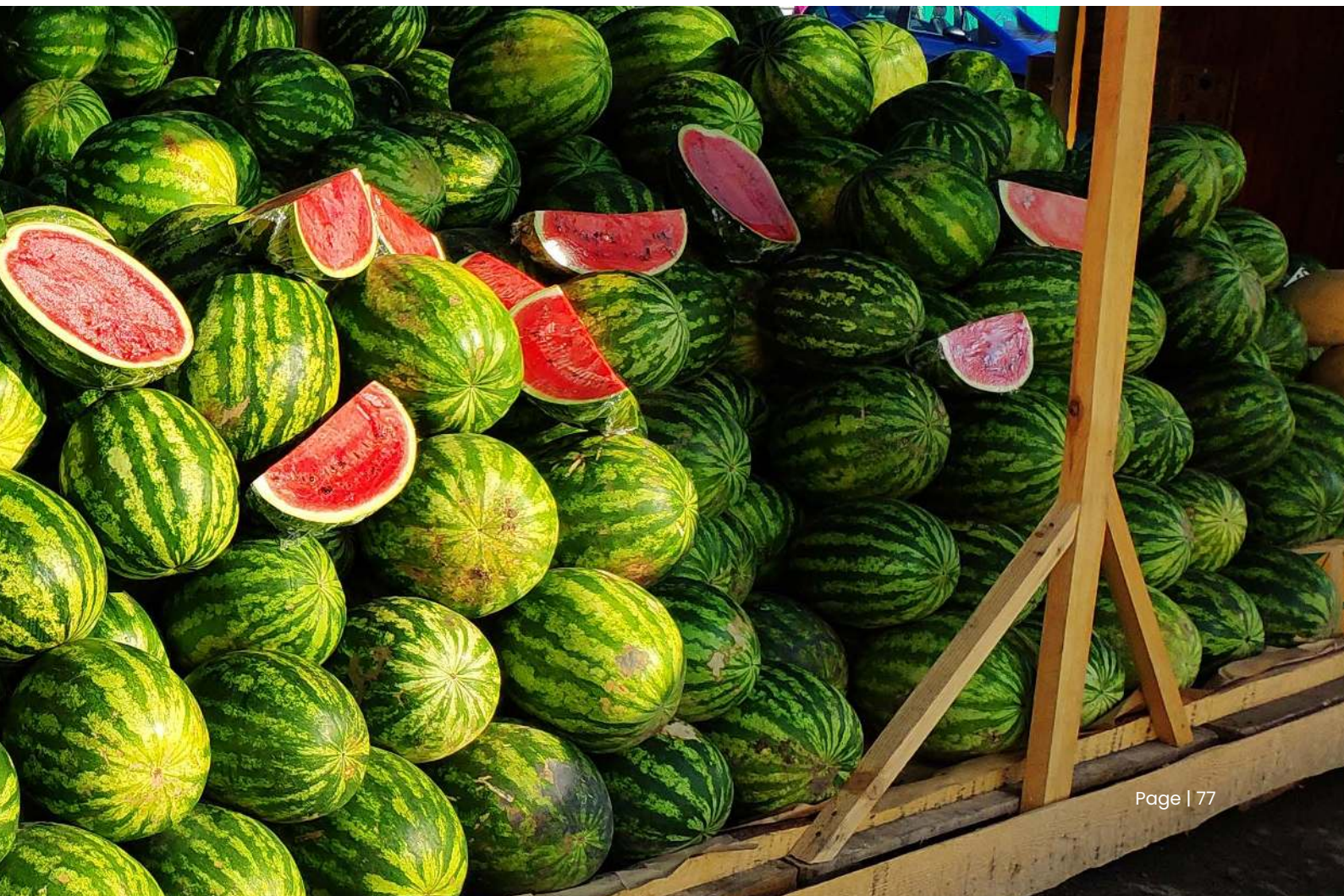
The Bigger Picture

At its core, Ramadan is a time of discipline, generosity, and collective empathy. For this focus to flourish, the practical needs of daily life must continue without disruption. Markets must remain supplied, and essential goods must remain accessible.

During this period, MPL intensifies its operations so that households and communities across the Maldives can slow their pace and turn their attention to faith, family, and community. Port teams coordinate vessels, containers, and clearances continuously, ensuring that the nation remains prepared for the holy month. By keeping the country's trade arteries open, MPL supports more than commerce; it sustains the conditions that allow the spirit of Ramadan to be observed, shared, and passed on from one generation to the next.

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Can Ports Drive Sustainability?

MPL's Approach to the SDGs



Mohamed Isam Abdulla Ibrahim
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Photo: Freepik

In the unique archipelagic geography of the Maldives, ports are more than just transit points for cargo; they are the lifelines of the nation. For an island state heavily reliant on imports for food, fuel, construction materials, and consumer goods, the efficiency of maritime ports dictates the pulse of the national economy. However, in the 21st century, the mandate of a modern port authority extends far beyond the loading and unloading of containers.

Today, leading maritime organizations are measured not only by their TEU (Twenty-foot Equivalent Unit) throughput but by their stewardship of the environment, their treatment of people, and their contribution to the long-term prosperity of their communities.

Maldives Ports Limited (MPL), as the steward of the nation's commercial harbors, has increasingly aligned its strategic operations with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



Anchoring Economic Growth and Innovation (SDGs 8 & 9)

At its core, MPL is a driver of SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth. The port is the engine room of the Maldivian economy. By ensuring the smooth flow of goods, MPL supports every other industry in the country, from tourism to construction. When the port operates efficiently, goods reach resorts and local markets faster and cheaper, stabilizing prices and ensuring business continuity across the atolls.

However, MPL's contribution to SDG 8 goes beyond mere logistics; it is deeply rooted in its progressive employment practices. The corporation is a major employer, providing stable, high-quality jobs to hundreds of Maldivians. A stand-out example of this commitment is the recently launched "Fahi" program. In a landmark move for inclusivity, MPL hired 40 persons with disabilities (PWDs) in a single intake, deploying them across various departments in Malé, Kulhudhuffushi, and Hithadhoo. This initiative directly addresses the target of achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men. By integrating these individuals into the workforce, MPL is not just offering jobs; it is providing financial independence and social dignity, proving that physical limitations are not barriers to economic contribution.

Closely linked to economic growth is SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure. A resilient nation requires resilient infrastructure. MPL has been aggressively modernizing its facilities to cope with the growing demands of the Maldivian economy. The strategic development of regional ports, such as the Hithadhoo Regional Port and Kulhudhuffushi Regional Port, is a direct contribution to building resilient infrastructure. By decentralizing port operations, MPL reduces the dependency on Malé, fosters regional economic hubs, and lowers the cost of logistics for northern and southern atolls.

Complementing these regional efforts is MPL's most ambitious infrastructure undertaking to date: the Thilafushi Port Relocation Project. This strategic initiative involves shifting the central commercial harbor from the congested capital, Malé, to the industrial hub of Thilafushi. The current Malé Commercial Harbour, which has served the nation for over 40 years, is operating well beyond its designed capacity of 1,500 containers, now handling double that volume. The relocation is a game-changer for SDG 9, replacing this space-constrained facility with a modern, high-capacity international terminal equipped with deep-water quays and advanced handling equipment.

Furthermore, MPL's digital transformation efforts; moving towards paperless transactions, online gate passes, and digital payments, enhance the efficiency of the logistics chain. This innovation reduces clearing times and operational bottlenecks, fostering a more competitive business environment in the Maldives. The upcoming development of the "Port Complex" in Malé is another testament to this goal. Envisioned as a mixed-use lifestyle hub, this project repurposes underutilized land into a modern asset that blends commercial utility with public service, showcasing how industrial infrastructure can evolve to meet modern urban needs.



Social Responsibility and Community Wellbeing (SDGs 3, 5 & 10)

Sustainability is fundamentally about people, and MPL has made significant strides in social welfare, touching upon SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being. Although port operations may appear distinct from public health concerns, MPL's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives reveal a deep commitment to community well-being. A prime example is the extensive renovation of the Isravvehing Naadhee (Center for Senior Citizens). By channeling resources into upgrading this facility, MPL has directly improved the quality of life for the elderly community, ensuring they have a safe, comfortable, and dignified environment. This project underscores the company's understanding that its operational success should translate into tangible benefits for the most vulnerable segments of society.

Internally, MPL prioritizes the health and safety of its workforce. The maritime industry is inherently high-risk, involving heavy machinery and complex logistics. MPL's rigid adherence to safety protocols, embodied in the motto "Your safety, our priority", ensures that economic productivity does not come at the cost of human health. Continuous training programs, provision of safety gear, and emergency response drills contribute to a safe working environment,

aligning with the SDG target of protecting labor rights and promoting safe working environments.

The corporation's commitment to SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities is perhaps most visible in the "Fahi" inclusive employment program mentioned earlier. In many societies, persons with disabilities are often left behind in the economic race. By actively recruiting and accommodating this demographic, MPL is dismantling structural barriers and reducing inequality within the country. This sends a powerful message to other State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) and the private sector: inclusivity is not just a charity; it is a viable human resource strategy.

Moreover, MPL continues to work towards SDG 5: Gender Equality. Historically, the maritime and port sector has been male dominated globally. MPL is slowly but surely shifting this narrative by encouraging women to take up roles not just in administration but in operational capacities as well. Through local and international partnerships, MPL is fostering an environment where women are empowered to participate fully in the maritime sector, ensuring equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making.



Photo: Maldives Ports Limited



Environmental Stewardship and Climate Action (SDGs 11, 13 & 14)

As an island nation, the Maldives is on the frontlines of the climate crisis, making SDG 13: Climate Action a non-negotiable priority. MPL has recognized that "business as usual" is no longer an option. The corporation has adopted a "Go Green!" policy that influences its operational decisions and community engagements.

A significant manifestation of this commitment is MPL's bold pledge to plant one million trees as part of the government's wider five-million-tree initiative. This is one of the largest environmental pledges by any state-owned enterprise in the country. This large-scale reforestation effort, which includes planting diverse species in Thilafushi and other operational sites, helps sequester carbon, cool urban environments, and restore biodiversity. By integrating "living green belts" into their infrastructure projects, MPL is taking direct action to combat climate change and mitigate coastal erosion. In terms of urban sustainability (SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities), MPL plays a critical role in managing the traffic and congestion of Malé City. The port is the primary

entry point for vehicles and heavy goods. The Thilafushi Port Relocation is pivotal here; by diverting heavy container trucks away from Malé's residential streets, MPL is directly addressing the capital's traffic congestion and paving the way for a safer, more livable urban environment. Until that relocation is complete, MPL optimizes gate operations and explores night-time clearance to mitigate the crushing traffic congestion that plagues the capital.

Perhaps most pertinent to a port operator is SDG 14: Life Below Water. The health of the harbor and the surrounding ocean is directly linked to MPL's operations. Ports are potential hotspots for marine pollution through oil spills, ballast water discharge, and plastic waste. MPL adheres to strict waste management protocols to prevent debris from entering the ocean. By enforcing regulations on vessels and maintaining clean harbor waters, MPL protects the marine ecosystems that are vital for the Maldives' fisheries and tourism industries.



Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17)

No single entity can achieve these ambitious goals alone. SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals is the glue that holds all sustainability efforts together. MPL has actively sought strategic partnerships to amplify its impact. A key example is the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Maldives Industrial Fisheries Company (MIFCO). This strategic alliance allows both entities to enhance operational efficiency, share technical resources, and collaborate on staff development.

Similarly, the collaboration with the Ministry of Social and Family Development to facilitate the employment of PWDs highlights how public-private (or public-public) partnerships can solve complex social issues. MPL also maintains active membership in international port associations, allowing it to exchange knowledge, technology, and best practices with global peers. These multi-stakeholder partnerships mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology, and financial resources to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in the Maldives.

Charting a Sustainable Course

The operations of Maldives Ports Limited are no longer confined to the quay wall. They extend into the homes of the citizens, into the green canopy of our islands, and into the blue depths of our oceans.

By weaving the Sustainable Development Goals into its corporate DNA, MPL is proving that profitability and sustainability are not mutually exclusive, but they are synergistic. As the Maldives navigates the challenges of the 21st century, from climate change to economic diversification, MPL stands as a pivotal contributor, helping steer the nation toward a more resilient and equitable future.

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Unlocking 24 Hour Access at Malé Commercial Harbour



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

A New Era for Maritime Trade

In an island nation like the Maldives, the port is more than a piece of infrastructure. It is the heartbeat of the economy. Every container that lands on our quay represents a necessary connection to the global supply chain. For nearly four decades, however, this vital heartbeat had a mandatory pause every night.

Since November 1988, the Malé Commercial Harbour operated under a specific restriction regarding pilotage services and access to the Port Limit Area. Between the hours of 00:00 and 06:00, the port effectively closed its gates to incoming vessels. Merchant ships arriving during this six-hour window were forced to drop anchor outside the harbour and wait for the morning light to enter.

On January 26, 2026, that era of waiting came to an end. In a historic operational shift, Maldives Ports Limited (MPL) officially lifted this restriction. We have inaugurated continuous 24-hour pilotage services for all vessels. This change is not merely an adjustment of working hours. It is a strategic evolution that aligns the Maldives with the continuous flow of international maritime trade.

Overcoming the "Dawn Bottleneck"

The restriction established in 1988 belonged to a different time in Maldivian history. Back then, the volume of vessel arrivals could be managed comfortably within an 18-hour window. The economy was smaller, and the demands of the supply chain were less intense. As the nation grew, so did the cost of downtime.

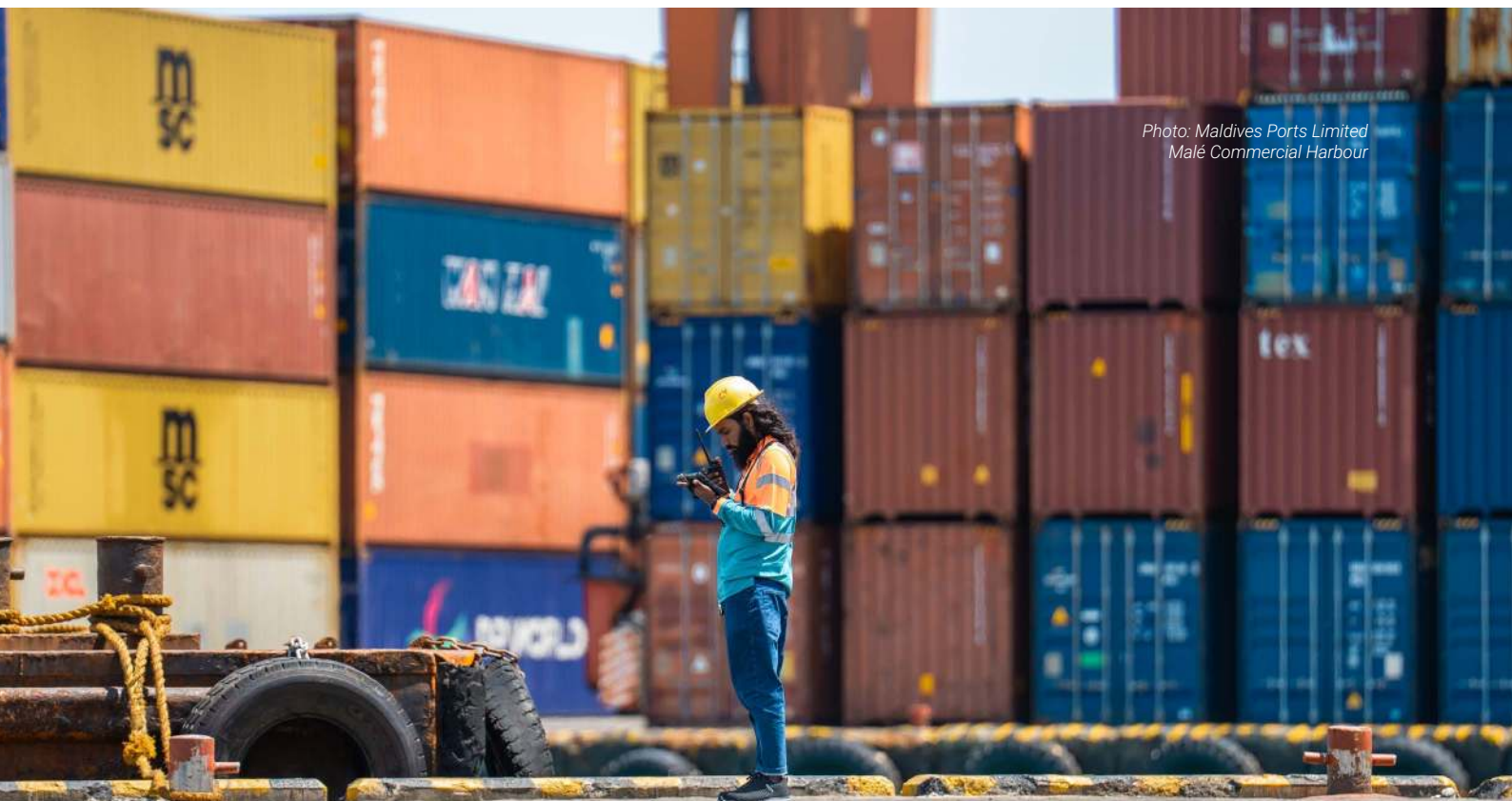
Under the previous system, a vessel arriving after 12:00 AM faced a significant delay. It had to idle at sea for six hours before it could even begin the entry process. This created what we might call a "dawn bottleneck." Multiple ships would often queue up, waiting for pilotage services to resume at 6:00 AM. This surge put immense pressure on port resources right at the start of the day and created a ripple effect of delays that could last until noon.

With the implementation of the new 24-hour service model, this bottleneck has been eliminated. Vessels can now enter the Port Limit Area at any time of day or night. Whether a ship arrives under the midday sun or in the quiet hours of the early morning, it is met with the same level of service readiness. This smooths out the flow of cargo operations and ensures that the port operates at maximum efficiency around the clock.

Efficiency and Economic Impact

The impact of this shift extends far beyond the harbour walls. In the world of logistics, time is the most valuable currency. Reducing waiting times at pilotage grounds lowers fuel consumption and operational costs for ship operators. This makes the Malé Commercial Harbour a more attractive and competitive destination in the region.

For local businesses and consumers, the benefits are tangible. Faster vessel entry results in faster discharging of cargo. Goods that previously sat offshore waiting for the port to open can now be processed and cleared hours earlier. When dealing with perishable goods or urgent construction materials, these gained hours translate into better shelf life and tighter project timelines. By removing the friction of waiting times, MPL is effectively speeding up the velocity of trade for the entire nation.



*Photo: Maldives Ports Limited
Malé Commercial Harbour*



Security and International Standards

Opening the port 24/7 requires more than just willing pilots. It demands a robust infrastructure of security and safety. The expansion to round-the-clock operations is supported by continuous security monitoring and International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) clearances.

We have ensured that the safety protocols protecting our borders and our waters remain uncompromised at all hours. This transition signals to the international maritime community that Malé Commercial Harbour is a modern gateway capable of meeting global standards of operation. We are proving that we can be both open and secure simultaneously.

A Collaborative Achievement

This transformation was not achieved in isolation. It reflects the successful implementation of the strategic mandates set by the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation. Operating under the Ministry's regulatory framework, MPL has aligned its service standards with the national vision for maritime modernization. This update to the port's operating hours demonstrates how policy and operations can work in tandem to directly strengthen the reliability of our trade gateway

As we move forward in 2026, the lifting of the night-time restriction stands as a testament to our commitment to operational excellence. We are no longer just keeping the gates open. We are ensuring that the engine of the Maldivian economy never has to idle. The port is now truly open, serving the nation with the urgency and dedication it deserves.

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