

# Uthandhu



## A Persistent Bottleneck:

The Congestion Challenge at Malé Commercial Harbor

President Muizzu Outlines Port Development Plans in 2026 Address

Port of Tomorrow  
A Modern Port at Thilafushi



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





# Letters to the Nation

Dear Nation,

Assalaamu Alaikum

Everyday ships arrive at our shores carrying the essentials that keep our nation moving: food for our families, medicines for the sick, materials for our homes, and supplies that support businesses across the Maldives.

Before these goods reach our islands, they pass through one gateway: OUR PORT.

As concerns grow around congestion at Malé Commercial Harbour, we believe it is important to address this issue directly with the people of the Maldives.

We understand that this situation has caused frustration for businesses, families, and communities across the country. We see it, and we hear your concerns.

Malé Commercial Harbour was built in 1986 for a very different Maldives, at a time when cargo volumes were lower, vessels were smaller, and the demands on the port were far less than what we are experiencing today.

Over the years, the Maldives economy has grown significantly. Our population has grown, tourism has flourished, businesses have grown, and developmental projects have increased.

Today, the port handles far more cargo and larger vessels than it was originally designed for. This increased demand, combined with limited operational space, has led to congestion and delays.

What is often overlooked is the work happening behind the scenes. Our teams work around the clock to manage vessel movements, coordinate cargo operations, and ensure essential goods continue moving across the country as efficiently as possible.

At the same time, we are actively working on long-term solutions.

The development of Thilafushi Port is a major step forward. It will expand capacity, improve efficiency, and help reduce congestion at the port. This is part of our long-term commitment to strengthening maritime infrastructure in the Maldives.

We remain committed to improving how we serve the nation, not only by managing today's challenges but also by investing in solutions that will support future growth.

As we navigate today's challenges, we thank you for standing with us as we build a better port for tomorrow.

Yours sincerely,  
Hussain Shafeeq  
Chief Executive Officer





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# A Persistent Bottleneck: The Congestion Challenge at Malé Commercial Harbor



Hassan Shifan  
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For an island nation like the Maldives, maritime logistics is not just an industry - it is the foundation of national trade and economic movement. Almost every commodity that supports daily life, tourism, construction, and industrial development arrives through the country's ports. At the center of this national supply chain is Malé Commercial Harbor, the country's primary commercial gateway operated by Maldives Ports Limited.

Over the years, Malé Commercial Harbor has played a critical role in facilitating trade and ensuring the steady movement of goods across the country. However, with the steady rise in cargo volumes and increasing vessel traffic, the port is facing one of its biggest operational challenges: congestion.

Malé Commercial Harbor has faced the challenges of congestion for many years. However, with the significant increase in cargo volumes, the port is facing several challenges in providing efficient port services.

Port congestion is the main factor behind longer ship turnaround times and cargo unloading delays. It reflects broader infrastructure limitations, operational pressures, and the growing demands of a rapidly developing economy. Today, congestion at Malé Commercial Harbor has become one of the most pressing logistical challenges in the country's maritime sector.

### **Growing Pressure on Port Operations**

The story of congestion at Malé Commercial Harbor is closely linked to the economic growth of the Maldives.

Statistics show a significant rise in container throughput over the past three decades. In 1995, the port handled 7,842 TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units). By 2023, that number had increased to 120,849 TEUs. Vessel calls have also risen considerably, from 303 vessels in 1995 to 466 vessels in 2023, while 2025 recorded 540 vessel movements. In the first three months of 2026 alone, 164 vessels have already been handled.

These figures demonstrate not only the growth of trade but also the increasing burden placed on the existing port infrastructure. This growth is not unexpected. The Maldives has experienced substantial expansion in tourism, infrastructure development, retail demand, and consumer imports over the years. As the economy grows, so does dependence on imported goods. With the increase in economic activity, the number of goods imported also rise in numbers.

However, while cargo demand has expanded, the physical footprint of Malé Commercial Harbor has remained constrained.

The current berth at Malé Commercial Harbor was constructed in 1997. Over the past 39 years, MPL has undergone many developments to manage port operations. However, the limited yard space is currently beyond a quick fix.

### **The Yard Space Challenge**

One of the main causes of congestion at the harbor is the lack of adequate yard space.

Container yards are essential for port operations. They provide temporary storage for imported cargo before clearance and onward distribution. When yard space becomes limited, the entire cargo movement cycle slows down.

At Malé Commercial Harbor, limited land availability has become a major bottleneck. Unlike larger international ports with room for expansion, the port in Malé operates within one of the most densely populated urban areas in the country. This creates physical limitations for storage, container stacking, truck movement, and operational planning.

As cargo volumes increase, containers occupy yard space for longer periods, reducing operational flexibility and increasing turnaround pressure.

This is not a new challenge. Historical studies on port operations in the Maldives had already identified storage limitations as a future congestion risk, warning that growing cargo demand would eventually exceed available handling and storage capacity.

Today, that challenge has become a daily operational reality.

## Operational Limitations Beyond Yard Space

Congestion at Malé Commercial Harbor is not caused by yard space limitations alone.

The port currently operates with only one berth, which is mainly designed to accommodate smaller vessels. This creates a significant operational limitation in handling larger cargo vessels.

Unlike many modern container terminals, Malé Commercial Harbor does not have shore-to-ship quay cranes. This means even vessels berthed at the port must rely on their own onboard cranes for cargo discharge.

This process is slower compared to modern crane-assisted unloading systems.

For larger vessels, the challenge is even greater. Due to berth limitations, many large cargo vessels are unable to dock directly at the harbor. Instead, they remain at anchorage and discharge cargo onto barges, which then transport containers to shore.

This barge-based unloading method adds another layer of handling.

Cargo is effectively moved twice:

First, from the vessel to the barge, and then from the barge to the port.

This creates operational inefficiencies, increases manpower requirements, and places additional pressure on yard management.

While the lighterage system has historically been an important part of port operations in the Maldives, it is increasingly becoming a limiting factor in an era of larger vessels and faster cargo demands.



Photo: Maldives Ports Limited  
Malé Commercial Harbour



Photo: Thilafushi Empty Container Depot

## The Impact of Congestion

Port congestion has wider implications beyond port boundaries.

For shipping lines, congestion can result in longer waiting times, slower cargo discharge, and reduced schedule reliability.

For importers, it can lead to delays in cargo clearance and increased operational costs.

For businesses, delayed cargo can disrupt supply chains, construction timelines, and market availability of goods. At a national level, congestion affects trade efficiency.

The Maldives depends heavily on imports. Any slowdown at the port directly affects the speed at which goods move into the economy and onward to the islands.

In sectors such as tourism and construction, where timing is critical, port efficiency becomes even more important. Port congestion also affects equipment productivity, workforce efficiency, and internal logistics planning.

Managing limited space while maintaining cargo flow requires constant coordination and operational discipline. Despite the limitations, Maldives Ports Limited continues to adapt and improve operations within the existing infrastructure. Operational planning has become increasingly important in managing vessel arrivals, yard allocation, and cargo movement.

Resource allocation, equipment scheduling, and cargo prioritisation now play a critical role in maintaining operational flow. However, there is only so much that can be achieved within the physical limitations of the port.

Efficiency improvements can help reduce pressure, but they cannot fully solve structural capacity constraints. The current challenge requires a long-term solution.

## The Long-Term Solution: Thilafushi Port Relocation

Recognizing the long-term limitations of Malé Commercial Harbor, the future of port operations lies in relocation.

The planned full relocation of port operations to Thilafushi represents the most significant transformation in the history of maritime logistics in the Maldives.

Unlike the current port, Thilafushi offers the physical space needed for expansion, modern cargo operations, and improved vessel accommodation.

The relocation will provide opportunities for:

- Larger berth capacity
- Deeper draft access for bigger vessels
- Modern cargo handling equipment, including shore cranes
- Expanded yard space for container storage
- Better truck movement and internal traffic flow
- Improved cargo turnaround efficiency

Most importantly, it will reduce dependence on anchorage cargo transfer and barge-based unloading. This means vessels will be able to berth directly and discharge cargo more efficiently.

For shipping lines, this improves turnaround times and for importers it reduces delays. In many ways, the Thilafushi relocation is not just a port project—it is a national logistics transformation.

## Looking Ahead

Congestion at Malé Commercial Harbor shows that trade volumes are increasing, economic activity is expanding, and the demand for efficient logistics continues to rise.

But it also highlights the limits of infrastructure built for a different time and a different scale of trade.

For decades, Malé Commercial Harbor has served as the backbone of national cargo operations. Its contribution to national development remains significant. Yet the demands of modern trade require modern infrastructure.

As the Maldives continues to grow, the transition to Thilafushi will become essential in shaping the future of port operations.

Until then, managing congestion at Malé Commercial Harbor will remain one of the most important operational priorities for Maldives Ports Limited.

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## President Muizzu Outlines Port Development Plans in 2026 Address



Hassan Shifan  
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The 2026 Presidential Address gave strong focus to the development of the maritime port sector, with the assurance that the port relocation project is expected to be completed in 2027.

In his address delivered on 5 February 2026, President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu highlighted the project as a major national priority to improve port efficiency.

*“The first phase of relocating the Malé Commercial Port to Thilafushi is another major undertaking,” the President said. “Today, MPL will sign with a contractor for the construction of the 125-metre international quay wall—the most critical component of Phase One.”*

As mentioned in the address, the contract for the design and survey of Phase One of the Thilafushi Port Relocation Project was awarded to China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC) on 5 February 2026.

Further speaking on the relocation of port operations to Thilafushi, the President stated that additional works required for the relocation, including the development of a 2-kilometre quay wall, paving, supporting infrastructure, and procurement of equipment are expected to be awarded within the year.

*“Allah willing, all works will be completed, and the Malé Commercial Port will be fully relocated to Thilafushi on 11 November 2027,”*

President Muizzu said.

The President also highlighted the improvements in port operations and efficiency expected once the relocation project is completed.

*“This transformation and operationalization will facilitate a reduction in vessel clearance times from the current seven days to just 48 hours, extend port storage periods, and significantly reduce the cost of importing goods into the Maldives,”*

The President further noted that these improvements in port efficiency will directly contribute to lowering the cost of imported goods, which remains a key concern for the public. The address placed strong emphasis on maintaining stable prices for essential commodities as an indicator of a healthy economy.

Over the past year, the government has expanded the list of essential food items to 23 goods, ensuring their availability at controlled and affordable prices within the Malé market. This measure is supported through coordinated efforts in importation and distribution, with the role of State Trading Organization (STO) being highlighted.

Another key initiative mentioned in the address is the establishment of duty-free cargo storage zones. The first of these was opened at Kulhudhuffushi Port in 2025, marking an important step towards decentralizing cargo storage and reducing pressure on Malé.

Photo: President's Office



The President also announced that a similar duty-free storage facility will be established and operationalized at Addu Port. These developments are expected to improve regional logistics by enabling goods to be stored and distributed closer to different population centers, thereby reducing transport time and associated costs.

The relocation of the port to Thilafushi is expected to further strengthen these efforts by creating a modern and centralized logistics hub. As outlined in the address, storage facilities in Thilafushi will replace existing arrangements in Malé, allowing for more organized and efficient handling of cargo.

Wholesale businesses currently operating within the Malé market area are also planned to be relocated to Thilafushi. This transition is expected to improve coordination within the supply chain and reduce fragmentation in storage and distribution activities.

In addition to operational benefits, the President highlighted the positive impact this relocation will have on urban congestion in Malé. The current market district and MPL operational areas are among the most congested parts of the city. With the relocation of cargo operations, these areas are expected to become more accessible for both vehicles and pedestrians.

Improved berthing facilities in Thilafushi will also enable cargo vessels to operate more efficiently, reducing turnaround times for loading and unloading. This will contribute to faster distribution of goods to islands across the Maldives.

Overall, the 2026 Presidential Address presented a comprehensive overview of ongoing and planned developments related to Maldives Ports Limited. The focus on port relocation, improved logistics, regional distribution, and price stability reflects a coordinated approach to strengthening the national supply chain.

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*Hassan Shifan is currently working as the Section 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.*



# PORT OF TOMORROW

## A Modern Port at Thilafushi



Maisa Ibrahim Naeem  
Manager, Marketing & PR  
Maldives Ports Limited

*Every day, long before the city wakes up, operations begin at the port.*

It is here that the containers are unloaded in the early hours, carrying everything from food and medicine to construction materials and essential goods: lifelines that keep the island communities running. For a nation dispersed across the ocean, the port is not just infrastructure; it is the heartbeat of everyday life.

But as the Maldives grows, so does the pressure on that heartbeat too.

Rising cargo volumes, increasing vessel traffic, and limited space have pushed existing port operations to their limits. What once supported the nation efficiently is now being challenged by the demands of a rapidly evolving future.

## *In response, Maldives Ports Limited is driving a bold and necessary transformation – The Port of Tomorrow, a modern port at Thilafushi.*

This is not simply an expansion project. It is a strategic shift in how port operations are designed, managed, and experienced.

### It is about

- Creating space where there is congestion,
- Efficiency where there are delays,
- & opportunity where there are constraints.

## **A Turning Point in Maritime Development**

For decades, the Malé Commercial Harbor has been serving as the country's primary gateway, enabling trade and supporting economic activity across all sectors. However, with sustained growth in cargo volumes and vessel sizes, the limitations of the existing infrastructure have become increasingly evident.

Congestion is now one of the most pressing operational challenges, impacting vessel turnaround time, reducing storage efficiency, and placing strain on logistics systems. Recognizing the urgency of this challenge, MPL has placed a clear strategic focus at the center of its transformation agenda: **Decongest To Grow**

This principle captures a critical reality: future growth is only possible if present constraints are addressed. By relieving congestion today, MPL is creating the capacity needed to support tomorrow's demands.

### **Decongest To Grow: Creating Space for the Future**

Bringing the "Decongest to Grow" strategy to life, MPL is advancing a phased transition of port operations through the National Port Migration Project, gradually shifting key activities from Malé Commercial Harbour (MCH) and the Hulhumalé International Terminal to the more expansive setting of Thilafushi.

This shift reflects a practical response to growing pressure on existing port infrastructure in the Greater Malé region. With space constraints increasingly affecting operational

efficiency, MPL is taking deliberate steps to redistribute activities and optimize how port space is used. A key focus has been the relocation of empty containers, freeing up critical capacity within active terminals, and improving overall flow of cargo operations.

Central to this effort is the Thilafushi Empty Container Depot, which commenced operations in September 2025. The facility plays an important supporting role in port logistics by managing the storage, maintenance, and redistribution of containers outside the main port environment. By shifting these functions away from high-traffic operational zones, MPL is actively reducing bottlenecks and improving turnaround times for both vessels and cargo.

The depot currently accommodates up to 1,600 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs), with ongoing land levelling and infrastructure upgrades aimed at increasing capacity to 3,000 TEUs—nearly doubling its current capability. This expansion represents a targeted, near-term solution to ease congestion while strengthening operational resilience.

Importantly, these efforts form part of a broader and carefully sequenced transition. The relocation of the country's main commercial port to Thilafushi remains a central pillar of this transformation, with interim measures such as the depot expansion helping to manage immediate operational pressures.

Progress on the larger relocation project continues to build momentum. In February 2026, the first phase was awarded to China Harbour Engineering Company, covering design and survey works. Initial surveys of quay walls—supporting both domestic and international operations—have already been completed ahead of schedule.

Further technical work is ongoing, including geotechnical studies and terminal layout planning, as MPL moves closer to realizing a modern, purpose-built port in Thilafushi. The target is operations of Malé Commercial Harbour to be shifted by 2027, aligning with the government's broader infrastructure development agenda.

Together, these efforts represent a clear and strategic direction, one that moves beyond managing congestion to systematically reducing it while creating the capacity needed to support the Maldives' continued growth.

## Shaping the Port of Tomorrow

The journey toward the Thilafushi Port is both strategic and phased. Each step from easing current congestion to building future-ready infrastructure contributes to a broader vision of a modern, resilient port system. Guided by the principle of Decongest To Grow, MPL is not only addressing the challenges of today but also preparing for the opportunities of tomorrow.

The story of the Maldives has always been shaped by the sea. Today, that story continues through its ports. The Thilafushi Port represents more than infrastructure; it represents progress, foresight, and a commitment to building a stronger future. It reflects a clear understanding that sustainable growth requires both vision and action.

*By creating space today, the Maldives is opening a door to new possibilities tomorrow.*



Photo: Maldives Ports Limited

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Photo: Magnific

# The Chokepoint Age & the Case for Port Resilience



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The Middle East war, the disruption of the Strait of Hormuz, and renewed stress on the Red Sea and Bab Al-Mandab route are no longer distant shipping problems. For an import-dependent island economy such as the Maldives, they are direct economic risks that can raise freight costs, fuel prices, food prices, construction costs, and the cost of living before the full impact is even visible in national trade statistics.

The Strait of Hormuz is one of the world's most critical energy chokepoints. The International Energy Agency notes that around 20 million barrels per day of crude oil and oil products moved through the Strait in 2025, equal to around one quarter of global seaborne oil trade. It also notes that bypass options are limited, meaning a sustained disruption can quickly affect global energy markets. For the Maldives, this matters because oil, fuel, freight, construction materials, food imports, and tourism-linked logistics are all connected to the same global cost chain.

Recent shipping data has shown how fragile the corridor has become. Reuters reported that daily transits through Hormuz had fallen sharply during the Iran-US war, with oil export movements disrupted and some tankers turned back under the blockade environment. LNG movements have also become uncertain, with Reuters reporting one ADNOC-managed LNG tanker crossing the Strait after weeks of disruption, while analysts cautioned that one successful crossing did not mean the route had become commercially safe or reliable.

The risk for the Maldives is not limited to whether ships can physically pass through a chokepoint. The larger risk is how uncertainty spreads across the maritime economy. When insurers' price war risks higher, when carriers reroute vessels, when bunker fuel becomes more expensive, and when shipping schedules become unreliable, the cost of moving goods rises. Those costs then pass through the import chain, from shipping lines and freight forwarders to wholesalers, contractors, resorts, guesthouses, retailers, public agencies, and households.

UN Trade and Development, UNCTAD, has repeatedly warned that maritime disruptions do not affect all economies equally. Its Review of Maritime Transport 2024 highlights that rising shipping costs can feed into consumer prices, and that small island developing States, SIDS, are especially exposed. UNCTAD's analysis of freight rates and maritime transport costs also shows how chokepoint disruptions can raise costs for consumers and weaken economic activity, particularly in economies that depend heavily on imported goods and maritime connectivity.



Photo: Magnific  
oil tankers and cargo ships docked at  
petrochemical storage facility

This is the practical danger for the Maldives. The country imports most of what it consumes, builds with imported materials, powers key sectors through imported fuel, and depends on maritime connectivity for tourism, construction, fisheries, retail distribution, health supplies, and public service delivery. In such an economy, freight cost inflation is not confined to shipping accounts. It becomes a household issue, a construction issue, a food security issue, a fiscal issue, and a private sector working-capital issue.

The Red Sea and Bab Al-Mandab route add a second layer of stress. Since late 2023, security risks in the Red Sea have forced many shipping companies to divert vessels around the Cape of Good Hope, lengthening voyages, absorbing vessel capacity, and increasing fuel use. UNCTAD's 2024 maritime transport analysis states that disruptions in the Red Sea, the Suez Canal, and the Panama Canal caused container shipping rates to rise and become more unpredictable. Its 2025 review further notes that spot container freight rates eased from their mid-2024 peaks but remained above levels seen before the Red Sea crisis began.

This matters because the Maldives is not a large origin or destination market that can easily force carrier behavior. A small market with limited direct calls, limited storage buffers, and heavy reliance on transshipment corridors is more vulnerable when shipping lines rationalize routes. If capacity tightens, carriers naturally prioritize larger, higher-yield, and more reliable port pairs. Smaller island economies then face the combined pressure of fewer options, higher rates, longer transit times, and less predictable delivery windows.

This is why port investment should be treated as national economic resilience, not only as infrastructure expansion. A modern port is not simply a quay, a yard, and cranes. It is a buffer between international disruption and domestic instability. It creates the space, systems, and service reliability needed to absorb volatility before it becomes empty shelves, stalled construction projects, delayed medical supplies, or sudden inflationary pressure.

The stress-test framework prepared for Maldives Ports Limited makes this sequencing clear. It argues that cost shocks arrive first, volume shocks arrive later, and liquidity pressure emerges in the gap between them. In practice, fuel, insurance, procurement, and delay costs can rise almost immediately, while lower import demand and reduced cargo throughput appear with a lag. This requires a trigger-based response framework, not reactive crisis management.

The same framework identifies three transmission channels for MPL: fuel and energy prices, shipping disruption, and macroeconomic weakening. Fuel shocks raise the operating cost base for port and marine fleets. Shipping disruption raises transit times, freight and insurance costs, and schedule unreliability. Macroeconomic weakening then reduces import demand, which can reduce container and cargo throughput after a delay.

The policy lesson is direct. If the Maldives waits until cargo volumes fall, it is already late. The first response should be to strengthen continuity capacity, including reliable berth windows, faster cargo clearance, yard productivity, digital documentation, fuel efficiency, receivables discipline, critical maintenance, and transparent communication with shipping lines and cargo owners.

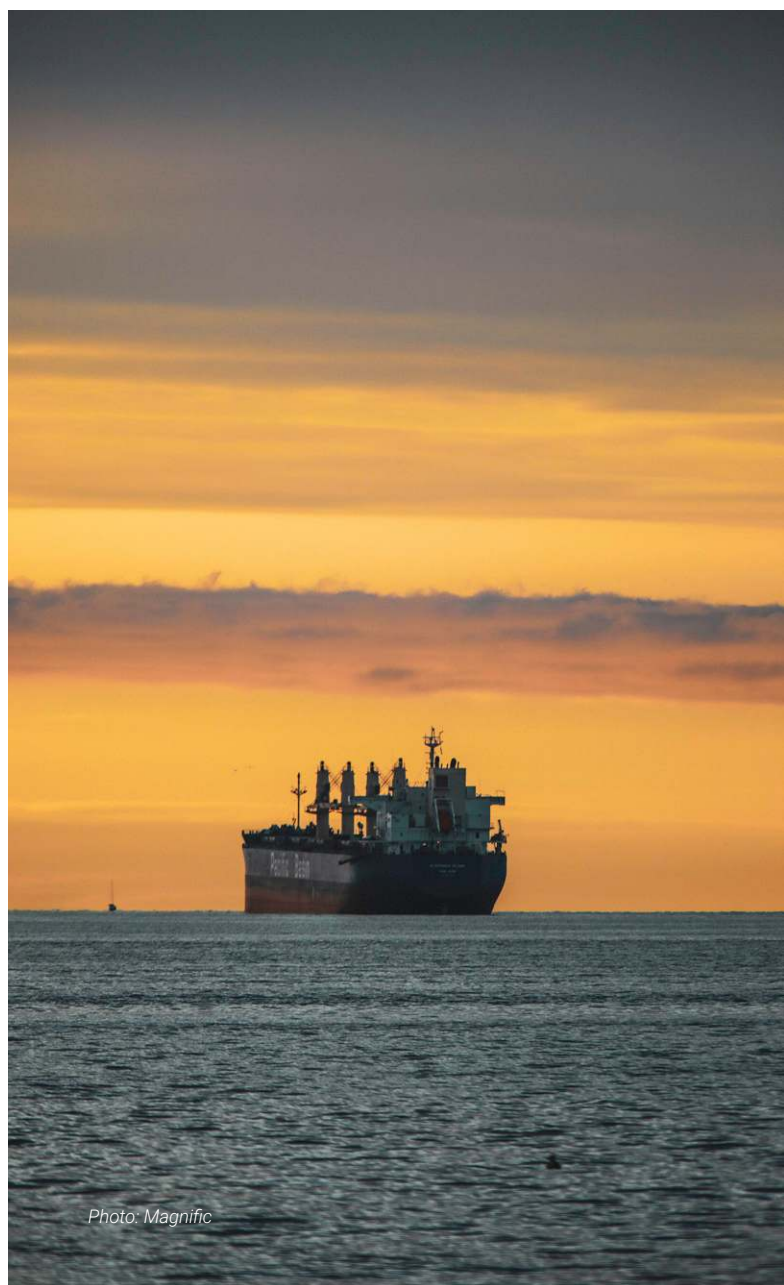


Photo: Magnific

## Annual Scenario Throughput Impact

Baseline annual TEU fixed at 2023–2025 moving average of actual throughput

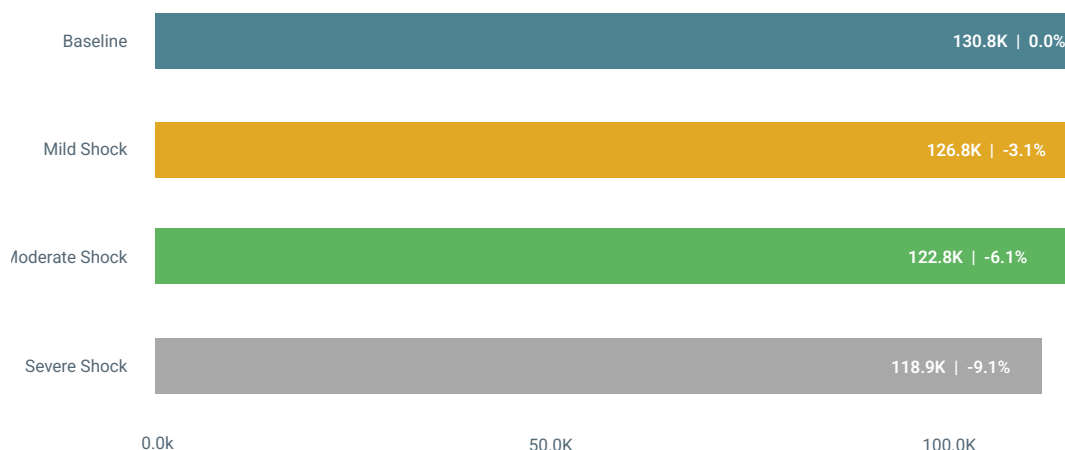


Figure 1: A sustained, lagged impact arising from the middle-east crises can affect economic growth, as tourism arrivals dip, construction costs rise, and the effect cascades across the real sector. This translates directly in to reduced imports, inflationary pressures over time.

UNCTAD’s 2025 work on port performance and trade facilitation reinforces this point. It states that port performance can be improved through better transparency and communication among public and private maritime stakeholders, supported by digital infrastructure such as trade single windows and maritime single windows. These measures reduce friction. In a normal period, they improve efficiency. In a crisis, they preserve confidence.

The Maldives should therefore view port upgrading, capacity expansion, and trade facilitation as a hedge against chokepoint concentration. Larger and better-organized capacity at strategic locations can help the country maintain service reliability when regional corridors become unstable. Additional storage capacity can smooth short disruptions. Improved berth productivity can reduce vessel waiting time. Automated gates, scanners, port community systems, and customs integration can reduce dwell time. Better domestic distribution links can prevent international disruption from turning into internal congestion.

The second hedge is commercial diversity. The country should not depend only on a narrow set of feeder patterns and inherited transshipment habits. Private sector participation, especially by liner operators and box logistics companies, can create alternative trade corridors and stronger gateway-cargo capabilities. Properly structured terminal concessions, joint ventures, or landlord-port arrangements can attract shipping expertise, capital, systems, and network commitments that a public port operator may not be able to build alone.

This does not mean surrendering national control over critical infrastructure. It means designing port partnerships carefully, with public-interest safeguards, tariff discipline, minimum service obligations, capacity commitments, data-sharing rules, and performance benchmarks. The objective is not privatization for its own sake. The objective is to bring global carrier networks closer to Maldivian cargo, reduce dependence on single routing habits, and create enough operational credibility for liners to treat the Maldives as a stronger gateway market.



Photo: Magnific  
Oil and gas tanker ship

The social dimension is equally important. Shipping disruption can quickly affect livelihoods. Construction workers suffer when materials are delayed or become unaffordable. Small retailers suffer when inventory costs rise. Guesthouses and resorts face higher food, fuel, and operating costs. Fishing and cold-chain businesses are exposed to fuel, spares, packaging, and export logistics. Households face higher prices for food and essentials. Public agencies face higher procurement costs for health, education, utilities, and infrastructure.

This is why ports must be understood as part of national stability. When ports perform well, they reduce the domestic pass-through of global shocks. When ports are congested, under-capitalized, or poorly connected, they amplify shocks. A delay at sea becomes a delay at berth. A delay at berth becomes yard congestion. Yard congestion becomes higher storage cost, missed delivery windows, lower business confidence, and ultimately higher prices.

For the Maldives, the strategic answer is not to assume that global chokepoints will remain open. The answer is to build national logistics systems that can continue functioning when they do not. This requires port capacity, digital facilitation, private sector participation, diversified liner relationships, contingency fuel and supply planning, and a permanent stress-testing model that links external shocks to port costs, cargo volumes, revenue, and liquidity.

The present crisis should therefore be treated as a warning. The Strait of Hormuz, Bab Al-Mandab, the Red Sea, the Suez Canal, and other chokepoints are not just lines on a shipping map. They are pressure points in the price of food, fuel, medicine, construction, and employment in small island economies. For the Maldives, stronger ports are not only a development ambition. They are one of the country's most practical buffers against global instability.

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*Mohamed Aiman Ali is a maritime business development and port strategy professional with close to a decade of experience across port development, investment planning, and sector governance. His work sits at the intersection of operational reality and boardroom decision-making, translating complex port capacity, terminal layout, and hinterland interface questions into financeable programmes and implementable delivery pathways. He has led port migration and continuity planning, built investment-grade forecasts and performance models, and prepared commercial appraisals covering CAPEX phasing, OPEX build-ups, and tariff-based revenue mechanics. He also writes and briefs on port reform, concession design, and strategic operating models, shaping high-level direction for policymakers and executive leadership.*



# ISPS Code Compliance in Small Ports



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Ports constitute the backbone of the Maldivian economy, facilitating the uninterrupted movement of essential goods across a geographically dispersed archipelago. Given the Maldives' heavy reliance on maritime transport for trade and inter island connectivity, port facilities represent critical components of national infrastructure. Ensuring their security is therefore not only an operational requirement but a strategic necessity for safeguarding economic stability and national resilience.

The adoption of the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code under the International Maritime Organization established a global framework for safeguarding port facilities against unlawful acts, including terrorism, smuggling, and sabotage. While large international ports often possess the institutional capacity and technological resources to implement these measures comprehensively, small ports particularly in developing and small island states face distinct operational and structural constraints.

This article explores the implementation of ISPS Code requirements in small ports, including Malé Commercial Harbour, Hulhumalé International Terminal, Hithadhoo Regional Port, and Kulhudhufushi Regional Port. It argues that while compliance is achievable, it requires adaptive, risk-based strategies tailored to spatial, operational, and resource realities.

## Operational Context Maldivian Ports

Ports in the Maldives operate within constrained geographic and infrastructural environments. Unlike large transshipment hubs operating in expansive operational space and infrastructure, ports in the Maldives accommodate diverse cargo types ranging from containerized goods, bulk materials and perishable cargo within limited physical footprints.

Malé Commercial Harbour serves as the primary gateway for national imports, handling the majority of inbound cargo. Hulhumalé Terminal serves as a logistics hub supporting Malé Commercial Harbour. Hithadhoo Regional Port, and Kulhudhufushi Regional Port, handle comparatively lower cargo volumes but face unique challenges due to their compact size and limited infrastructure. These ports often lack clear segregation between operational areas, storage zones, and cargo handling paths, resulting in overlapping functions that complicate both operational efficiency and security management. According to United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, small island developing states (SIDS) often face structural limitations in port infrastructure, which complicate the implementation of standardized international security frameworks. In the Maldivian context, these constraints directly influence how ISPS measures are operationalized on the ground.



Photo: Maldives Ports Limited  
Malé Commercial Harbour

## Key Challenges in ISPS Code Implementation

### Spatial Constraints and Infrastructure Limitations

One of the most significant challenges in a small port is the limitation of physical space. ISPS compliance requires the establishment of restricted areas, controlled access points, and secure perimeters. However, in compact ports such as Malé Commercial harbor, operational zones frequently overlap.

Temporary cargo storage, dense equipment concentration, and elevated levels of human activity contribute to operational bottlenecks and increase vulnerabilities within the port environment. The International Maritime Organization emphasizes the importance of clearly defined security zones within port facilities. Yet achieving such spatial segregation in small ports requires continuous operational adjustments rather than fixed infrastructure solutions.

### Surveillance and Monitoring Challenges

Effective surveillance is fundamental to ISPS compliance, yet small ports face practical constraints in deploying comprehensive monitoring systems. Physical obstructions such as stacked containers create blind spots that generate exploitable gaps, potentially enabling undetected movement, unauthorized access, and increased security risks. These conditions necessitate enhanced on-site active monitoring and strategic manpower deployment to compensate for these limitations.

Developing ports often face significant financial and investment barriers when adopting digital technologies, which can limit their ability to fully replace traditional manual processes and security practices with advanced systems. In Maldivian ports, this translates into a hybrid model where mobile patrols, manual observation, and selective camera deployment complement each other to maintain situational awareness.

### Operational demands

Small ports must balance stringent security requirements with high operational demands. Cargo throughput pressures necessitate rapid handling and clearance processes, which can conflict with access control procedures and inspection protocols.

The ISPS Code advocates a risk-based approach to security, allowing flexibility in implementation based on threat levels. However, in high paced environments such as Malé Commercial Harbour, maintaining this balance requires constant coordination between operations and security teams. Seasonal fluctuations, varying cargo types, and inter island logistics further complicate this dynamic.

### Resource and Capacity Constraints

Resource limitations are a defining characteristic of small port operations. Security teams are often required to manage multiple zones simultaneously, while budgetary constraints restrict investments in advanced surveillance systems, access control technologies, and training programs.

According to Research by United Nations Conference on Trade and Development indicates that capacity gaps in smaller ports are a global issue, particularly in developing economies, where compliance is often achieved through procedural adaptation rather than technological investment.

Despite these constraints, Maldivian ports demonstrate resilience through efficient manpower utilization, prioritization of high-risk areas, and adaptive operational practices.

## Strategies for Strengthening ISPS Compliance

### Optimized Spatial Planning and Zoning

Effective space management is critical for integrating security into daily port operations. Ports implement clearly defined cargo zones, restricted areas, and movement pathways using temporary barriers, markings, and signage.

Such measures align with IMO recommendations on port facility layout and access control, enabling small ports to maintain functional segregation despite spatial limitations.

### Risk Based Security Deployment

Risk based deployment of security resources ensures that manpower is utilized efficiently. Personnel are strategically assigned to high risk and high traffic areas, where the likelihood and impact of security incidents are greatest, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of threat mitigation. This approach reflects global best practices in maritime security, where flexibility and adaptability are essential for maintaining effective security coverage.

### Technology Integration within Resource Constraints

While large scale surveillance systems may be financially unfeasible, small ports adopt cost-effective technological solutions, including compact CCTV systems, mobile monitoring units, and portable access control devices.

The layered security approach combining technology with human oversight is widely recognized as an effective model for ports with limited resources.

### Operational Coordination and Institutional Integration

Strong coordination between security and port operations is essential for embedding ISPS procedures into routine activities. Regular briefings, drills, and training programs ensure that personnel remain prepared, responsive, and fully aligned with established security procedures and incident response protocols. According to IMO guidelines, training and drills are fundamental components of port facility security plans, particularly in environments where rapid response is critical.



## Data Integrated Security Framework

Small ports can strengthen security management by implementing a data-integrated security framework that centralizes incident reporting, monitoring, and compliance tracking. This framework establishes a standardized approach for recording, analyzing, and responding to security incidents, while supporting continuous improvement within the port facility. Security activities, including surveillance, incident response, and compliance monitoring, are coordinated through a centralized system to ensure consistency, accountability, and effective oversight. Security data is systematically recorded and periodically reviewed to identify trends, detect vulnerabilities, and enhance decision-making. By integrating these processes, small ports can maintain operational oversight, procedural consistency, and improved security performance, even under resource constraints.

## National Regulatory and Institutional Support

In the Maldives, the Minister of Economic Development, Transport and Trade functions as the designated authority overseeing ISPS compliance. Strengthening national regulatory frameworks and codifying security procedures tailored to small ports can enhance consistency and provide clearer operational guidance.

National level support also facilitates resource allocation, technical assistance, and alignment with international standards, reinforcing the overall security posture of port facilities.

## Conclusion

The implementation of ISPS Code requirements in small ports reflects a complex interplay between international standards and local operational realities. Spatial limitations, surveillance challenges, operational pressures, and resource constraints shape how security measures are applied in practice.

Nevertheless, through adaptive strategies such as risk-based deployment, optimized space management, technology integration, operational coordination, and the data-integrated security framework, small ports demonstrate that effective compliance is achievable even under constrained conditions. As emphasized by the International Maritime Organization, maritime security is not solely dependent on infrastructure but on the effectiveness of systems, procedures, and human capacity. In this regard, Maldivian ports exemplify a pragmatic and resilient approach to ISPS implementation.

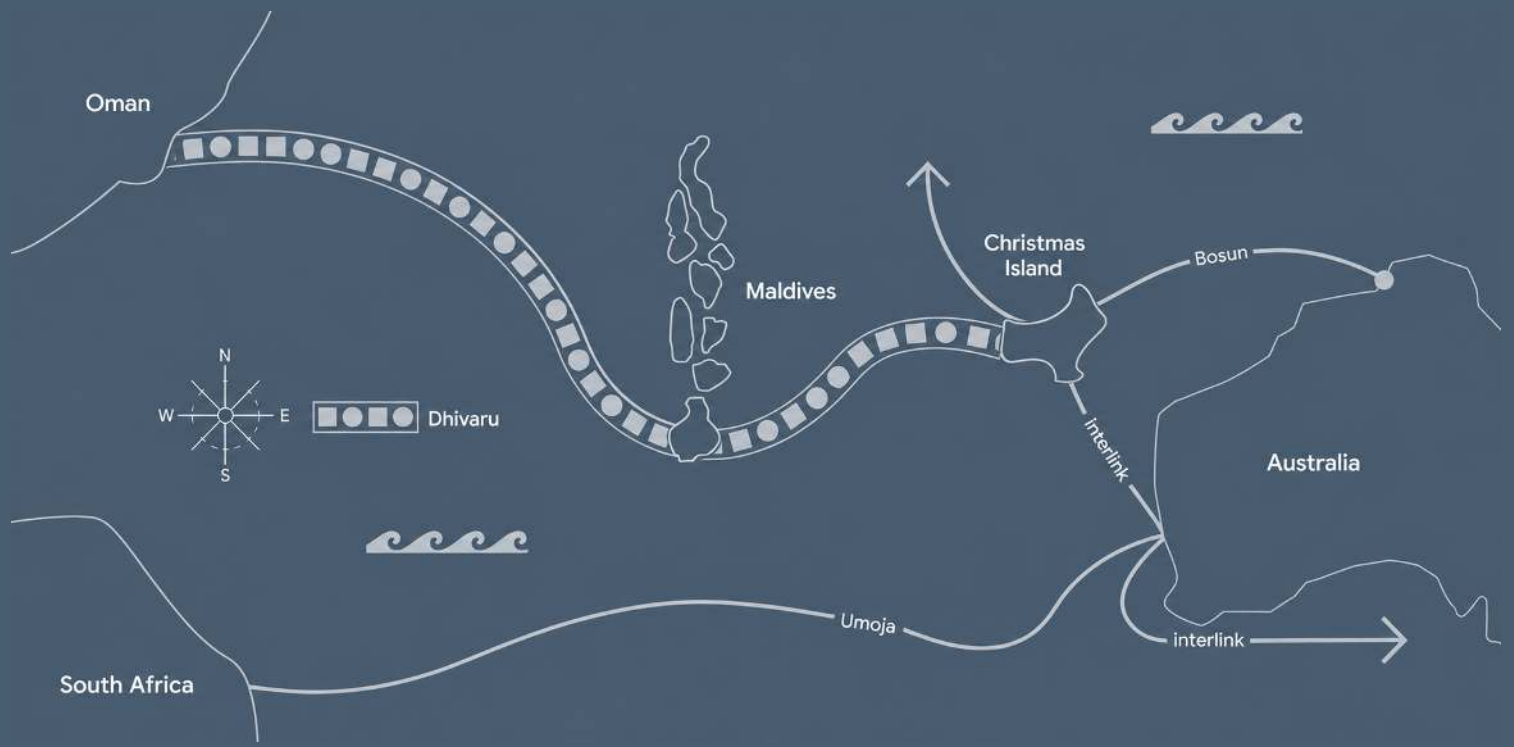
Ultimately, strengthening port security in small states requires a combination of national support, international alignment, and operational innovation. By embracing these principles, Maldivian ports continue to safeguard critical supply chains, support economic stability, and uphold the integrity of the nation's maritime infrastructure.

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### AUTHOR

*Ahmed Sobah is a Deputy Manager of Port Security at Maldives Ports Limited (MPL). He brings over seven years of dedicated experience in the maritime sector, comprising four years in internal audit with a specialization in ISPS audits and three years in port security. His professional contributions include ISPS compliance, risk assessments, and other key port security management activities across regional ports. Ahmed has further strengthened his expertise by completing ISPS-related trainings in Japan, Malaysia, and the Maldives. He is committed to advancing maritime security standards and supporting the sustainable growth of the Maldives' port industry.*





# The Strategic Importance of Undersea Cables to Maldives' Maritime Security



Lt Col Ahmed Jameel  
Commanding Officer Cost Guard Ship Dharumavantha  
Maldives National Defence Force

## Introduction

The Maldives is a small island nation located in the central Indian Ocean, composed of nearly 1,200 low-lying coral islands spread across an expansive maritime area of approximately 90,000 square kilometres. Unlike continental states or countries with land borders, the Maldives is not connected to any other country by land. Its physical isolation means that all forms of connectivity—economic, political, digital, and security-related—depend almost entirely on maritime and undersea infrastructure.

Among the existing infrastructure that dots the ocean, undersea fibre-optic cables are critical and serve as the backbone of the Maldives' digital connectivity. These cables enable internet access, international communications, financial transactions, government operations, and national security communications. They are the *raison-d'être* of a nation's virtual existence. In the absence of terrestrial alternatives, any disruption to these undersea cables would effectively isolate the country from the global digital ecosystem. Therefore, the security of undersea cables is not merely a technical concern but a core national security concern for the Maldives, closely linked to its maritime security environment.

## Why Undersea Cables Are Vital to Maldives' National and Maritime Security

For the Maldives, undersea cables underpin almost every critical sector of the state. Tourism—the country's primary economic engine—relies on uninterrupted digital connectivity for bookings, payments, logistics, and international communications. The financial sector depends on real-time data exchange with global banking systems. Government ministries, emergency services, and defence institutions rely on secure digital communications to function effectively.

From a maritime security perspective, undersea cables also support Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA). Coastal radar systems, vessel tracking, port operations, and coordination with international maritime partners are all digitally enabled. A disruption to cable connectivity would degrade the Maldives' ability to monitor its vast Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), respond to maritime incidents, and coordinate and manage complex security operations.

The experience of the Russia-Ukraine War has underscored how modern conflicts extend far beyond traditional battlefields. Since 2022, there has been heightened concern over the vulnerability of undersea cables in regions such as

the Baltic Sea, where multiple unexplained cable cuts raised fears of sabotage, hybrid warfare, and grey-zone operations. While not all incidents were conclusively attributed to deliberate action, the conflict demonstrated how undersea infrastructure can become a strategic target during periods of geopolitical tension.

For a small and geographically isolated state like the Maldives, similar disruptions—even if accidental—could have disproportionately severe consequences. Unlike larger states with multiple redundant connections, the Maldives has limited alternative routes and repair capabilities, increasing its exposure to prolonged outages. It does not have the existing ecosystem to manage sabotage of undersea cables. For instance, it does not have a robust shipbuilding industry that can support the quick repair of undersea cables, thereby, making it mandatory for Maldives to rely on external assistance for repair in case a sabotage incident occurs.

Photo: Magnific



## Lessons from Regional Conflicts: Russia–Ukraine and the Iran Conflict

Beyond Europe, ongoing tensions involving Iran further illustrate the strategic importance of maritime and undersea infrastructure security. The Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, and surrounding waters have witnessed repeated incidents involving tanker seizures, attacks on commercial shipping, and threats to submarine cables and energy pipelines. These actions highlight how maritime chokepoints and undersea assets can be leveraged as tools of political pressure and asymmetric warfare.

Although the Maldives is geographically distant from major conflict zones, it lies along the critical Indian Ocean sea lanes that connect Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. The Indian Ocean is increasingly viewed as a theatre of strategic competition, and the militarisation of the Indian Ocean is possible with state and non-state actors seeking opportunities to exploit vulnerabilities in undersea infrastructure. The conflicts involving Iran demonstrate that even limited maritime actions—such as interference with shipping or damage to seabed infrastructure—can have global economic and security ripple effects.

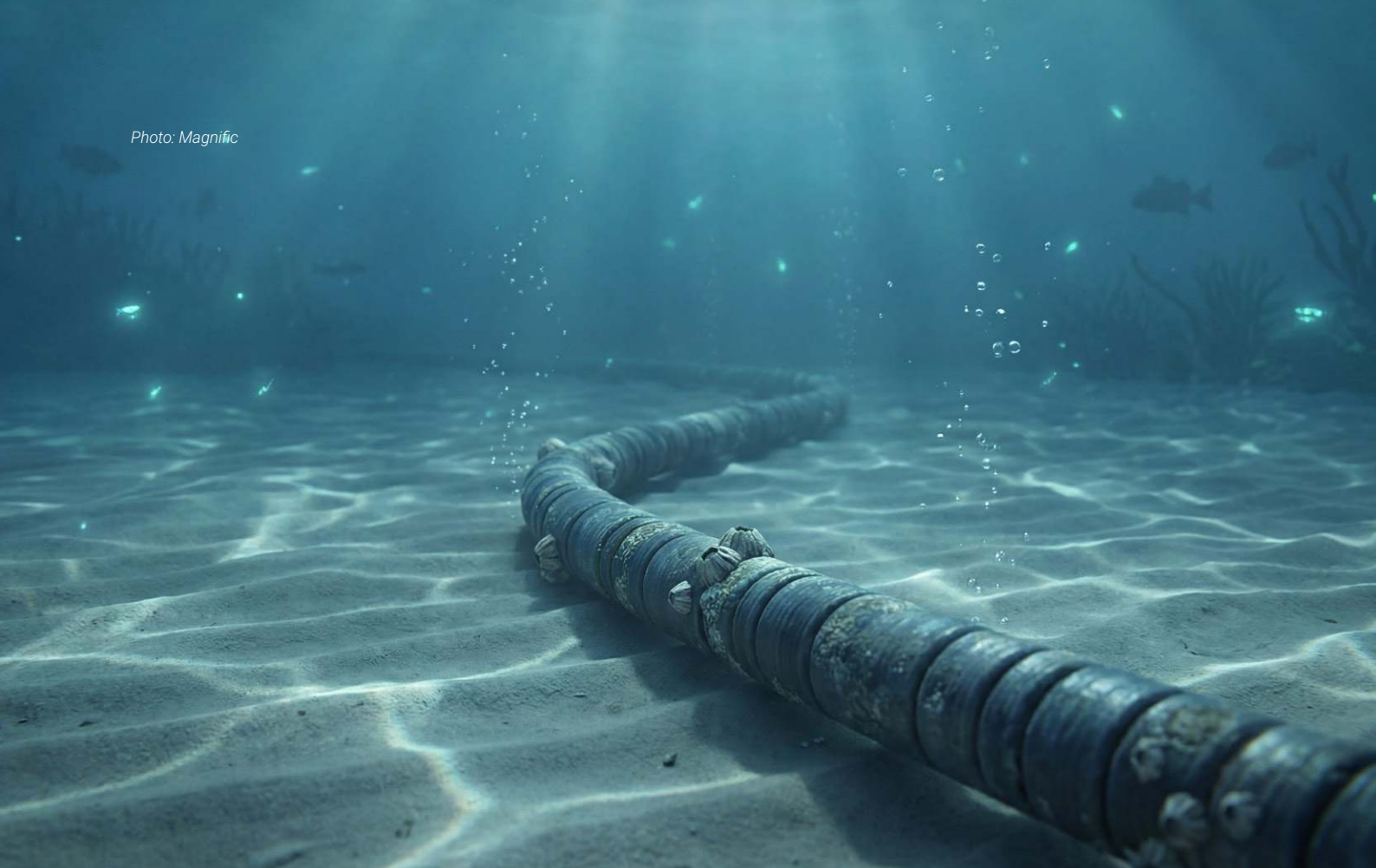
For the Maldives, these examples reinforce a sobering reality: **undersea cables are no longer neutral civilian infrastructure**. In times of heightened tension, they can become strategic targets or collateral damage in an ensuing conflict. This reality elevates the protection of undersea cables from a technical responsibility to a central element of maritime and national security planning.

## Protecting Undersea Cables: Challenges for a Small Island State

As a small state with limited resources to manage the maritime security, the Maldives faces inherent challenges in protecting undersea cables and other critical maritime infrastructure. The country has a vast maritime domain but a relatively small Defence force and Coast Guard, constrained budgets, and limited access to advanced surveillance technologies. Unlike major powers, the Maldives cannot maintain continuous underwater monitoring or deploy specialized assets such as submarine detection systems.

However, limited resources do not equate to limited options. One of the most effective strategies for the Maldives is **prioritization**. Rather than attempting to monitor the entire EEZ uniformly, security efforts can focus on **critical zones**, such as cable landing points, shallow-water routes, ports, and areas of high maritime traffic. Cable landing stations, in particular, represent strategic chokepoints that can be protected through layered security measures, including restricted maritime zones, patrols, and physical safeguards. One example of such zone/ infrastructure in future will be in Addu city, the project Dhivaru.

Another critical approach is **risk-informed maritime governance**. This involves integrating undersea cable protection into broader maritime security frameworks, including port security, coastal surveillance, and disaster response planning. By treating undersea cables as critical national infrastructure—on par with ports and airports—the Maldives can ensure that their protection is embedded in national security policy rather than treated as a purely commercial concern.



## Cooperation, Partnerships, and Capacity Building

For a country like the Maldives, **international cooperation is indispensable**. Undersea cables are transnational by nature, often owned and operated by consortia involving private companies and foreign governments. Effective protection therefore requires close coordination between the Maldivian government, cable operators, and regional partners.

Partnerships with larger maritime powers and regional organizations can enhance surveillance, information sharing, and response capabilities. Joint maritime patrols, intelligence-sharing arrangements, and capacity-building initiatives can significantly improve situational awareness around critical infrastructure. Regional cooperation in the Indian Ocean also helps deter hostile actions by increasing transparency and collective oversight. For example, the MNDF Coast Guard maintains a permanent liaison officer at the Information Fusion Centre–Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), enabling coordination with the Indian Navy to monitor and gather intelligence on any threats, harm, or disruptions to undersea cables.

The Maldives can also benefit from investing in **dual-use technologies** that support both civilian and security objectives. Improved vessel tracking systems, satellite-based monitoring, and maritime data fusion centres like IFC IOR and IFC Singapore can enhance both economic management and security preparedness. Even modest investments in these areas can yield significant returns by improving early warning and response capabilities. Similarly, Maldives needs to invest in redundancies to ensure that the potential sabotage does not reduce its option and its real-time access to data and communication networks.

Equally important is the development of **legal and regulatory frameworks**. Clear rules governing maritime activity near cable routes, strict enforcement against illegal anchoring or fishing in sensitive areas, and close coordination with port authorities can significantly reduce the risk of accidental damage—still the most common cause of cable disruptions globally.

## Conclusion

In an increasingly interconnected and contested maritime environment, undersea cables have emerged as silent but indispensable pillars of national security. For the Maldives—a geographically isolated island nation with no land connections—these cables are lifelines that sustain economic activity, governance, defence, and international engagement.

The lessons from the Russia–Ukraine war and ongoing tensions involving Iran demonstrate that undersea infrastructure is vulnerable not only to accidents and natural hazards but also to strategic manipulation and hybrid threats. While the Maldives does not face the same level of geopolitical confrontation, its dependence on undersea

connectivity makes it uniquely vulnerable to disruption. Protecting undersea cables is therefore not an optional undertaking but a strategic necessity. Through prioritization, regional cooperation, capacity building, and the integration of cable security into broader maritime governance, the Maldives can mitigate risks despite its limited resources. In doing so, it will strengthen not only its digital resilience but also its maritime security and national sovereignty in an increasingly uncertain world.

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### AUTHOR

*Lt Col Ahmed Jameel is a serving officer in the Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF), with 20+ years of experience in the maritime domain. He also has a postgraduate degree in International Relations from Salve Regina University, USA. The author acknowledges that the statements, opinions and arguments made are his own and do not reflect the Maldivian Government's policies and position.*

# Fake ChatGPT Apps & Ransomware Attacks: When AI Hype Becomes an Attack Vector



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*Photo: Magnific*

## Introduction

The rapid rise of generative AI has created new opportunities for innovation, but also new attack surfaces for cybercriminals. Threat actors are exploiting the popularity and trust associated with tools like ChatGPT to distribute malicious software, combining familiar intrusion techniques with modern social engineering. Recent reporting shows that AI is no longer just a tool used by attackers, but a central component of how they gain initial access. Organizations should treat AI-themed lures as an emerging initial access vector rather than a niche threat.

## AI Branding as an Infection Vector

Security researchers and vendors are observing a growing trend in which attackers disguise malware as legitimate AI tools. Users searching for ChatGPT clients, plugins, or productivity applications are increasingly targeted with malicious installers and fake software.

Microsoft security analysis highlights that financially motivated actors are using modular malware frameworks to establish initial access and deploy follow-on payloads. This aligns with broader threat trends identified by The European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA), which show that social engineering and initial access brokers remain key drivers of ransomware activity.

These campaigns exploit user trust in widely recognized AI tools. AI-branded software appears credible, lowering suspicion and increasing the likelihood of installation.

## PipeMagic and Modular Backdoor Deployment

One example of this trend is the PipeMagic backdoor. Microsoft describes PipeMagic as a modular framework used in intrusion chains that lead to ransomware deployment. Once installed, it enables attackers to maintain persistence, communicate with command and control (C2) infrastructure, and deliver additional payloads.

Broadcom reports that PipeMagic has been observed, disguised as a ChatGPT application. By presenting itself as a legitimate AI tool, the malware increases the likelihood of execution and initial compromise.

Its modular design allows attackers to adapt their operations after gaining access. Depending on the target environment, they can deploy credential theft tools, move laterally across the network, or stage ransomware.

## From Initial Access to Operational Disruption

PipeMagic is typically not the final payload. It serves as an entry point within a broader attack chain.

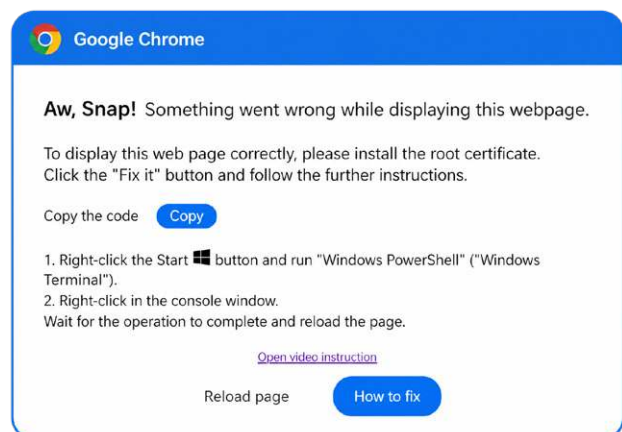
ENISA reporting shows that modern ransomware operations follow a structured progression from initial access to lateral movement and eventual payload deployment. Attackers establish persistence, expand their access across systems, and exfiltrate data before deploying ransomware.

In port and logistics environments, this risk is amplified. A single compromised laptop belonging to an administrator or third-party vendor can provide a pathway from corporate IT systems into operational environments. Once inside, attackers can disrupt port operations at commercial ports such as Malé Commercial Harbour, potentially impacting the timely availability of essential goods.

Industry reporting consistently highlights supply chain access and weak network segmentation as key vulnerabilities in these environments.

## Social Engineering Evolution: ClickFix and Fake Prompts

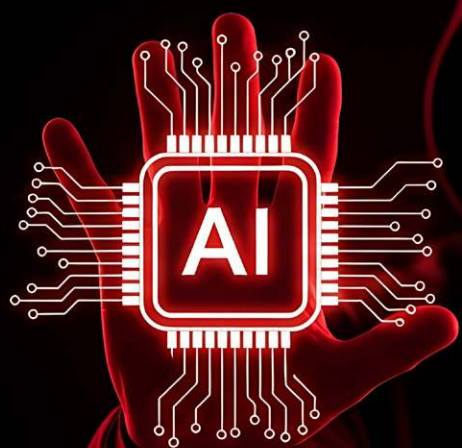
Proofpoint has identified the rapid spread of the ClickFix technique across the threat landscape. This method tricks users into executing malicious commands by presenting them as fixes or required actions.



Example of early ClickFix technique used by ClearFake.

At the same time, Netlas has documented the rise of fake prompts and interface-based deception. Attackers mimic legitimate user environments, including AI chat interfaces, to guide users into downloading or executing malicious software.

These techniques play a critical role in initial access. By exploiting user trust and interaction, they create a pathway for malware delivery, which can include modular backdoors such as PipeMagic. Once deployed, these backdoors enable persistence, command and control, and enable ransomware deployment.



## Mitigation Measures

The defensive measures required are well established, but increasingly urgent.

Organizations should remove local administrator privileges for daily users to limit malware installation and persistence, and block unknown or untrusted installers through application control policies. Endpoint detection and response tools should be deployed with rapid isolation capabilities, and offline backups must be maintained and regularly tested to ensure recovery from ransomware incidents.

User awareness is equally critical. Staff should be trained to recognize fake AI applications, suspicious download prompts, and ClickFix-style instructions that request command execution or system changes.

Individual users also play a critical role in reducing risk. Users should avoid downloading AI tools from unofficial sources, verify the legitimacy of applications before installation, and treat unexpected prompts or “fix” instructions with caution, particularly those that request system changes or command execution.

## Conclusion

The use of fake ChatGPT applications reflects a broader shift in attacker strategy, where trust in widely adopted technologies is actively exploited. Reporting from Microsoft and Broadcom shows how these campaigns can evolve from simple infection to full ransomware deployment. Combined with social engineering techniques such as ClickFix, they form an effective attack chain that targets both users and systems.

Organizations should treat AI-themed lures as a primary initial access risk and strengthen controls around software installation, endpoint monitoring, and user awareness. The techniques may be familiar, but the delivery method has changed, and the potential impact now extends beyond IT systems into real-world operations.

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### AUTHOR

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# The Role of Private Terminals in the Maldives' Evolving Port System



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The Maldives' port system is often viewed through a simplified lens, with Maldives Ports Limited (MPL) regarded as the sole operator of maritime cargo handling in the country. While MPL remains the primary gateway for international trade and the central node of port operations, this perception does not fully reflect the broader operational landscape.

Over time, the system has gradually evolved in response to increasing trade volumes, changing cargo profiles, and spatial constraints within the capital region. Alongside the core services provided by MPL, a number of privately operated port facilities have been established, particularly in Thilafushi. These facilities operate within an approved regulatory framework and serve specific operational functions that complement the national port.

The emergence of private terminals is therefore not indicative of a shift away from a centralized port model, but rather a measured transition towards a more distributed and functionally specialized system.



Photo: vhp.lmv  
Dry bulk sorting at the Thilafushi Industrial Zone

## Operational Context and System Constraints

The main commercial harbor in Malé, operated by MPL, handles the majority of the country's containerized and general cargo traffic. As an import-dependent economy, the Maldives relies heavily on the efficiency of this gateway, which operates under sustained demand within a geographically constrained environment.

Limited space for expansion, combined with increasing container throughput, has placed pressure on berth availability, yard capacity, and vessel turnaround times. Within this operational setting, accommodating cargo types that require specialized infrastructure, such as liquid bulk, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), cement, and other bulk commodities, presents additional complexity.

These cargo categories require dedicated handling systems, storage facilities, and safety measures that are not easily integrated into a high-density container port environment. Managing them within the same operational space can affect efficiency and, in certain cases, pose logistical and safety challenges.

In response, the government has enabled the development of private port facilities designed specifically to handle such cargo streams. This approach ensures that essential commodities can be processed through appropriate infrastructure while reducing operational pressure on the main port.

### Development of Private Terminals in Thilafushi

The concentration of private terminals in Thilafushi reflects its growing role as the Maldives' primary industrial and logistics zone. With greater land availability and designated industrial use, Thilafushi provides the spatial and operational flexibility required for specialized port infrastructure.

Its proximity to Malé further enhances its strategic relevance, allowing for efficient transfer of goods between port facilities and commercial centers. Over time, this has supported the emergence of a multi-operator environment where port activities are integrated with storage, processing, and distribution functions.

Within this setting, several operators have developed port facilities under approved frameworks issued by the Minister of Economic Development, Transport and Trade. These include:

- Villa Hakatha Pvt Ltd
- Apollo Holdings Pvt Ltd
- The Hawks Pvt Ltd
- State Trading Organization

These facilities are authorized to undertake cargo handling operations within defined scopes, particularly for specialized and bulk cargo categories that require dedicated operational environments.

### Functional Specialization of Private Operators

A defining feature of private terminals in the Maldives is their focus on specific cargo segments, allowing for the development of tailored infrastructure and operational processes.

Villa Hakatha Pvt Ltd has established facilities supporting energy logistics and bulk materials, including LPG storage systems, oil tanks, and cement handling infrastructure. This enables the management of supply chains that are essential for construction and energy distribution.

Apollo Holdings Pvt Ltd operates a private port facility with internationally compliant security standards, including ISPS certification. Its infrastructure supports cargo handling operations that contribute additional capacity to the national system, particularly for non-containerized cargo.

The Hawks Pvt Ltd operates facilities closely linked to fuel importation and distribution, forming part of a broader logistics network that serves multiple islands. This is particularly significant in ensuring reliable fuel supply across the archipelago.

The State Trading Organization operates dedicated terminal facilities for strategic commodities, including fuel and essential goods. While state-owned, its operations contribute to the overall diversification of cargo handling locations within the national system.

Through this level of specialization, private terminals provide operational environments that are more suited to specific cargo types than a centralized port facility could efficiently accommodate.



## Integration within the National Port System

The development of private terminals represents a complementary extension of the national port framework rather than a parallel system.

MPL continues to function as the primary hub for containerized and general cargo, maintaining its central role in maritime trade. Private terminals, in contrast, handle specialized cargo streams that benefit from dedicated infrastructure and operational separation.

This functional distribution enhances overall system performance by reducing congestion at the main port, improving vessel turnaround times, and ensuring that critical commodities can be handled without disruption. It also reflects a broader trend in port development, where multi-terminal configurations are used to manage increasing operational complexity.

## Implications for an Evolving Port System

The presence of private terminals highlights an ongoing transition in the Maldives' port sector towards a more diversified and resilient structure. Rather than relying on a single operational node, the system is gradually developing into a network of interconnected facilities, each fulfilling defined roles within the supply chain.

This approach supports scalability by enabling capacity to be expanded across multiple locations. It also enhances operational resilience, as cargo handling is not solely dependent on one facility. At the same time, it creates opportunities for targeted investment in specialized infrastructure.

In considering the continued development of private terminals, it is also important to recognize that operational and infrastructure requirements vary depending on the type of cargo handled. Facilities managing liquid bulk, LPG, or dry bulk commodities are designed with specialized quay structures, handling systems, and safety measures that differ from those of conventional container terminals. While all port facilities operate within established regulatory frameworks, the application of technical standards and operational practices may differ across terminals due to their functional specialization. As the port system becomes more distributed, ensuring alignment in safety, efficiency, and compliance practices across both public and private operators will remain an important area of focus.



Photo: Google Photos  
Villa Hakatha, Thilafushi site

## Outlook for the Maldives Port System

The role of private terminals in the Maldives is best understood within the context of an evolving port system shaped by operational necessity and economic demand. While Maldives Ports Limited remains the cornerstone of maritime trade, private facilities provide essential support by accommodating specialized cargo and extending overall system capacity.

This integrated model reflects a practical response to the constraints of a centralized port environment, enabling the Maldives to maintain efficient and reliable supply chains. As trade volumes continue to grow and logistics requirements become more complex, the coordinated development of both public and private port infrastructure will remain a key factor in the sector's continued progression.

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# Bridging Distance with Data: A National Strategy for Island Logistics



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*Photo: Magnific*

Island nations are defined by their geographically dispersed landmasses, separated by vast stretches of oceans. In the case of the Maldives, populations are spread across hundreds of these islands. This fragmentation creates a unique, complex logistical environment where the movement of goods becomes multilayered and highly dependent on maritime connectivity. Whether it is essential commodities or commercial cargo, every shipment must navigate port networks, vessels and in some cases, inter-island distribution systems before reaching its final destination.

Unlike larger countries, where supply chains benefit from continuous land networks, island nations such as the Maldives rely almost exclusively on coordinated transport systems to ensure the availability of goods for its people and to sustain economic activity. In such a context, a National Logistics Strategy becomes essential to warrant reliability, efficiency, and long-term economic stability.

Imports as % of GDP	60-70%
Food imports	21%
Fuel Imports dependency	~100%

*Note: Adapted from The Global Economy (April, 2026), Trading Economics (April, 2026), MV+ News Desk (April, 2026).*

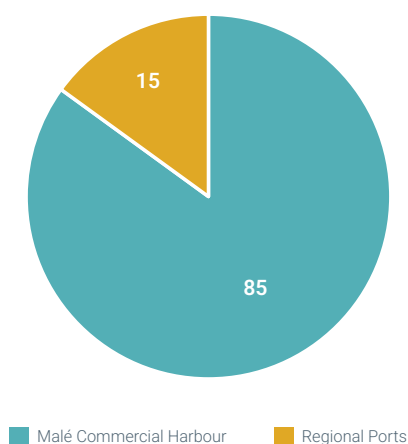
### The Structural Challenge of Island Logistics

The logistics landscape of island nations is inherently shaped by fragmentation. In the Maldives, cargo typically arrives at a central port such as Malé Commercial Harbour (MCH) before being sorted, stored and distributed via smaller vessels to atolls and islands, often requiring several stages of handling before the goods reach their end users.

This multilayered process results in structural inefficiencies, where each additional handling point increases the risk of delays, damage, and cost escalation. Inter-island transport remains one of the most resource intensive components of the supply chain, with scheduling constraints, weather dependencies and limited backhaul opportunities further complicating operations.

Moreover, the concentration of logistics activity around a single primary hub such as MCH places added pressure on infrastructure while creating bottlenecks that can ripple across the entire network. Furthermore, limited coordination between port authorities, shipping operators, regulatory bodies, and other key stakeholders further compounds these challenges.

Without a unified framework in place, logistics systems in island nations often become fragmented and inefficient, resulting in issues that directly impact the cost of living, business operations, and overall economic performance.



*Note: Adapted from World Bank (April 2026)*

## A National Imperative: Building an Integrated Logistics System for the Maldives

For island nations like the Maldives, logistics must function as a cohesive national system, instead of as a collection of independent services operating in without connection. A National Logistics Strategy provides this foundation, aligning infrastructure, operations, and policy into a coordinated network that serves both economic and social objectives.

At its core, a strategy like this enables system-wide integration. Ports, warehousing facilities and inter-island transport networks must operate as interconnected components of a single supply chain ecosystem, rather than separate entities. This coordination allows for better planning of cargo flows, improved utilization of assets and the elimination of redundancies that can often arise in fragmented systems.

Another point that is equally important is the impact on cost efficiency. Without any strategic oversight, overlapping routes, underutilized capacity, and repeated cargo handling contribute significantly to logistics costs. A national approach allows for route optimization, proper consolidation of shipments, and efficient scheduling, which ultimately will reduce the financial burden on customers and businesses alike. In an import dependent economy such as the Maldives, these efficiencies translate directly into more stable and affordable access to goods.

Logistics cost (% of GDP)	15-25%	8-10%
Transport cost for implemented goods	High	Moderate
Cost of inter-island transportation	Very High	N/A

*Note: Adapted from Transport Geography (via World Bank for GDP Data, 2026), UNCTAD (May, 2024), UN-OHRLS (2025)*

Beyond cost issues, a National Logistics Strategy enhances reliability and service predictability. For large businesses that operate across multiple islands, sometimes atolls, consistency in delivery timelines is critical. A coordinated system that is supported by standardized processes and aligned stakeholders reduces uncertainty and strengthens confidence in the supply chain. This is particularly vital for time sensitive goods such as perishables and essential commodities.

Island nations are especially vulnerable to external shocks ranging from global supply chain disruptions to fuel price volatility and adverse weather conditions. A well-structured logistics strategy enables proactive planning, including the development of buffer stock mechanisms, diversified distribution routes and contingency frameworks that ensure continuity of supply during periods of disruption, strengthening national resilience in the face of such potential crises.

Within the Maldivian context, while Malé continues to serve as the primary logistics hub, the over-reliance on a single center presents operational and strategic limitations. A National Logistics Strategy would facilitate the development of a more distributed and balanced network, incorporating regional hubs such as both Kulhudhuffushi and Hithadhoo regional ports, thus improving connectivity across the atolls. This system wide integration would alleviate pressure on existing infrastructure but also promote more economic participation across the nation.

Ultimately, the establishment of a National Logistics Strategy is a national requirement. It changes logistics from a series of disconnected activities into a unified system capable of supporting sustainable growth, positioning the Maldives for long term resilience in an increasingly complex global trade environment.



## Digital Logistics as a Strategic Enabler

The role of digital systems in a logistics strategy is to enhance and optimize an already efficient and resilient supply chain. It should be viewed as a strategic enabler that amplifies the effectiveness of an already well-coordinated system, rather than a standalone solution.

In a traditional logistics environment, limited visibility across the supply chain often can lead to reactive decision making. Delays, congestion, and inefficiencies are addressed only after they occur which can result in lost time and increased operational costs. The integration of digital tools transforms this dynamic by enabling real-time visibility and data-driven coordination across all stages of the movement.

Key systems such as port community platforms, cargo tracking technologies and integrated scheduling tools allow stakeholders to access accurate and timely information. This facilitates better planning of vessel movements, improved allocation of storage space, and more efficient coordination between port operators and inter-island transport services. This will reduce idle time, minimize bottlenecks, and enhance overall throughput. Furthermore, digital integration between port authorities, customs, and transport operators streamlines administrative processes, reducing paperwork and the likelihood of human error. This will be particularly valuable in high volume environments such as MCH.

Cargo Visibility	Limited	Real-Time
Port turnaround time	Longer	Reduced (10-30%)
Documentation processing	Manual	Digital
Error Rate	Higher	Lower

*Note: Adapted from World Bank Group (2023), UNCTAD (2023)*

However, the effectiveness of these technologies is inherently dependent on the presence of a clear strategic framework. Without a proper National Logistics Strategy to guide implementation and standardization, digital systems risk becoming fragmented, mirroring the inefficiencies they are intended to solve.

### Strategy and Smart Systems: The Way Forward

The path forward for island nations lies in effectively combining strategic planning with technological advancement. A National Logistics Strategy provides the structural clarity required to organize and optimize the movement of cargo, while digital systems enhance the precision, speed, and responsiveness of that framework.

For the Maldives, this represents an opportunity to transition towards a fully integrated logistics system, one where infrastructure, operations, and information systems function in alignment. Such an approach would enable faster cargo movement, reduced operational costs, and improved accessibility of cargo across all atolls and islands. More importantly, it would position the Maldives to move beyond regular logistical constraints and further leverage its geographic location as a strategic advantage.

### Bridging Distance Through Strategy

Geography has long defined the logistical realities of island nations, presenting challenges that cannot be altered. Therefore, the way these challenges are managed is entirely within control. For the Maldives, where connectivity is closely linked to economic stability, logistics should be made a national priority.

A well-defined National Logistics Strategy provides the structure needed to overcome fragmentation and improve efficiency and reliability. When this framework is supported by targeted digital innovation, it becomes even more powerful, enabling smarter connections and greater system wide visibility.

Ultimately, bridging distance is a matter of strategy, not geography. With the correct approach, island nations can transform logistical constraints into opportunities for integration, resilience and sustainable development.

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Photo: Zuvaan Masveriya  
Ha. Uligan

# Uligan Marina Project:

## Reimagining the Northern Gateway of the Maldives



Asadh Hammadh  
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Maldives Ports Limited

The Maldives has long been celebrated as a worldclass destination defined by its natural beauty, maritime heritage, and hospitality excellence. Yet, while the country's tourism landscape has evolved significantly over the decades, certain maritime opportunities remain underdeveloped, particularly beyond the central region. The Uligan Marina Project represents a decisive step toward addressing this gap, positioning the northern Maldives as an integral part of the nation's evolving maritime and tourism ecosystem.

Located at the northernmost edge of the archipelago, Uligan has historically served as a natural anchorage for vessels entering the Maldives from international routes. Its geographic position has made it a familiar waypoint for yachts navigating between regions, even in the absence of formal facilities. The Uligan Marina Project builds on this natural advantage by transforming Uligan from a passive stopping point into a managed, secure, and purposeful maritime gateway. In doing so, it reflects Maldives Ports Limited's broader mission to unlock value through strategic infrastructure development while supporting national, regional, and community aspirations.

## Unlocking Untapped Maritime Potential

Maritime connectivity lies at the heart of the Maldivian economy. While commercial ports support trade and national supply chains, recreational and leisure marine traffic presents a different yet equally valuable dimension of maritime engagement. The Uligan Marina Project recognizes this opportunity by introducing a dedicated facility designed to welcome, manage, and serve international leisure vessels in a manner consistent with global standards.

Rather than creating demand artificially, the project formalizes activity that has existed informally for years. Visiting yachts have long sought shelter and rest in the waters around Uligan, often without access to essential services or structured clearance processes. By providing a properly managed marina environment, the project allows the Maldives to capture value from this traffic in a controlled and sustainable way. More importantly, it enables the country to shape how maritime tourism evolves in the northern atolls, ensuring alignment with national goals, environmental safeguards, and community interests.

## A Strategic Shift in Tourism Diversification

The Maldivian tourism model has traditionally been dominated by resort islands and centralized infrastructure. While this model has delivered global recognition and economic success, diversification has become increasingly important to ensure resilience and inclusive growth. The Uligan Marina Project contributes to this diversification by expanding the tourism narrative beyond resorts and into high-value maritime experiences.

Marina-based tourism attracts a distinct group of travelers; long-stay visitors, live-aboard enthusiasts, and luxury yacht crews, whose spending patterns differ from traditional resort guests. These visitors seek authentic interaction, high-quality services, and flexibility in travel. By enabling this segment to enter and experience the Maldives through a purpose-built northern gateway, the project broadens the national tourism proposition while complementing existing offerings rather than competing with them.

Crucially, this approach supports a more geographically balanced distribution of tourism activity. By anchoring maritime tourism in the north, the Uligan Marina Project helps reduce regional disparities and directs new opportunities toward communities that have historically remained outside the tourism spotlight.

## Delivering Value Through a Balanced Partnership Model

One of the defining strengths of the Uligan Marina Project lies in its development model. Maldives Ports Limited assumes the role of strategic enabler, developing and safeguarding core maritime and security infrastructure, while partnering with an experienced external operator to deliver day-to-day marina and hospitality services.

This model allows MPL to fulfill its mandate as a national ports authority while avoiding unnecessary operational exposure in areas outside its traditional core competencies. By retaining ownership and regulatory oversight of critical assets, including port infrastructure and security facilities, MPL ensures that national interests are protected. At the same time, the expertise of a specialized private operator brings international best practices in marina management, customer service, and lifestyle offerings.

This separation of roles creates a balanced structure where accountability, performance, and long-term sustainability is embedded into the project framework. It also demonstrates how public and private collaboration can be used effectively to advance national development objectives.

*Photo: Zuvaan Masveriya  
Ha. Uligan*



## Empowering Communities and Strengthening Local Economies

Beyond its national and institutional significance, the Uligan Marina Project carries profound implications for the local community. Infrastructure, when designed thoughtfully, has the power to transform livelihoods, and this project is no exception.

The presence of a managed marina introduces new employment and enterprise opportunities across a range of sectors. Hospitality, security, logistics, transportation, marine services, and retail all become potential pathways for local participation. Importantly, many of these opportunities are accessible to small and medium-scale entrepreneurs, allowing community members to engage directly with international visitors.

The project also encourages the preservation and commercial viability of local culture. Visitors arriving by sea often seek meaningful experiences; local craftsmanship, cultural encounters, and island-based services. By creating a structured point of interaction between visitors and residents, the marina becomes a platform where culture, commerce, and community identity can coexist. Over time, this interaction supports skills development, youth engagement, and the retention of traditional knowledge within a modern economic framework.

## Enhancing National Security and Maritime Governance

As an international entry point, the Uligan Marina Project strengthens national maritime governance and security architecture. Managed entry facilities, supported by established port and security protocols, ensure that vessel arrivals are processed efficiently, transparently, and in accordance with international obligations.

This capability enhances the Maldives' ability to manage its maritime borders while improving service quality for legitimate visitors. It also reinforces confidence among international stakeholders by demonstrating the country's commitment to safety, compliance, and professionalism in all maritime domains. For Maldives Ports Limited, this role aligns naturally with its responsibility to support national security objectives through well-governed port infrastructure.



## A Commitment to Environmental Responsibility

Any coastal development in the Maldives must be approached with a deep respect for the surrounding marine environment, and the Uligan Marina Project is grounded in this understanding. From the earliest planning stages, environmental protection and sustainability have been treated as fundamental design principles rather than secondary considerations.

By integrating controlled construction methods, defined operational standards, and clear responsibilities for environmental management, the project aims to ensure that development and conservation move forward together. A managed marina environment also provides greater oversight of waste handling, fuel management, and vessel operations compared to informal anchorage, ultimately reducing long-term environmental risk.

This approach reflects a broader shift in how maritime infrastructure is conceived in the Maldives, where economic opportunity is pursued alongside stewardship of the nation's most valuable natural assets.

## Positioning MPL for the Future

For Maldives Ports Limited, the Uligan Marina Project represents more than a single development initiative. It marks an evolution in how the organization contributes to national growth. By venturing into high-value maritime tourism infrastructure through a carefully structured model, MPL reinforces its role as a forward-looking asset owner and facilitator of economic activity.

The project complements MPL's traditional port operations while showcasing its ability to identify emerging opportunities, manage complex stakeholder environments, and deliver infrastructure that creates long-term value. It also strengthens MPL's presence beyond the central region, reinforcing its national footprint and commitment to inclusive development.

## Conclusion: A Gateway to Shared Prosperity

The Uligan Marina Project stands as a compelling example of how strategic infrastructure can unlock hidden potential. By transforming a historically underutilized anchorage into a vibrant maritime gateway, the project connects international travelers, local communities, and national institutions in a shared vision of progress.

Its value lies not only in physical structures, but also in the opportunities it creates; opportunities for diversification, empowerment, cultural exchange, and sustainable growth. As the Maldives continues to chart its future as a leading ocean nation, initiatives such as the Uligan Marina Project demonstrate how thoughtful maritime development can serve as a bridge between tradition and modernity, local identity and global engagement.

In doing so, the project reinforces Maldives Ports Limited's enduring role at the intersection of sea, society, and national ambition.

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### AUTHOR

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Photo: Maldives Ports Limited  
Malé Commercial Harbour



# Guardians of the Ancient Mariners: The Olive Ridley Project in the Maldives



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*Photo: Rayyu Maldives  
Brennia Kottefaru Maldives  
Unsplash*



## The Ocean's Ancient Mariners

The Maldives is defined by its relationship with the ocean, a dispersed archipelago of more than 1,000 islands spread across 26 atolls. Beneath the surface of these waters exists a highly sensitive marine ecosystem. Here, sea turtles, some of the most ancient of mariners that have been gliding through our seas since the age of dinosaurs, face mounting modern threats. Among the most persistent issues is the growing challenge of marine debris, particularly the hidden dangers of ghost fishing gear.

To address this crisis, the Olive Ridley Project (ORP) has developed a focused conservation programme centered entirely on marine turtles. Established in 2013 following repeated observations of turtle entanglement in discarded nets, the organization has expanded its vital work across rescue, rehabilitation, field research, and community engagement in the Indian Ocean region. Their approach considers wildlife health, ecosystem conditions, and human activity as interconnected factors within the same marine system. However, at the very heart of their mission are the individual lives they work tirelessly to save.

### A Story of Resilience: Haleema's Journey

To truly understand the impact of ORP's work, one only needs to listen to the stories of their rescues. For Ahmed Iyaad, Programme Coordinator at ORP Maldives, the release of a tiny sea turtle named Haleema after 42 days of dedicated clinical care changed the way he looks at the ocean.

This small olive ridley was rescued by the dive team from Kuramathi Resort in Ari Atoll, where she had been found floating and entangled in a nylon bag.

*"She was no bigger than two palms pressed side by side, so small she didn't weigh even a single kilogram, and so weak from injury and stress that every movement seemed an effort,"* Iyaad recalls.

Through the meticulous planning of her rescuers, ORP's ground team, and their partners at Trans Maldivian Airlines, she was transported via seaplane to the newly opened Sea Turtle Health Institute (STHI) at Jawakara Islands Maldives.

*"I still remember carrying her across the airport, feeling the weight of her small body and the enormity of the responsibility to get her to safety at STHI,"* Iyaad shares.

Upon arrival, clinical assessments revealed the severe extent of her injuries. A deep cut and a fractured bone in her front right flipper left the veterinary team with a difficult decision to amputate. She was also slightly anemic and showed signs of mild kidney dysfunction.

Despite the overwhelming odds, she endured. A unique and touching tradition at ORP is that every rescued patient is named by the very person who first encounters them during an incident. The organization actively encourages rescuers to choose traditional Dhivehi names, creating a deeply personal and cultural bond between the local community and the marine life they help save.

*"While our team provided her with the best possible medical care, Haleema too fought on, with three flippers and a brave heart, living up to her name: Haleema for resilience in Dhivehi,"* the team notes.

Her recovery was not immediate, but wonderfully gradual. It was a mosaic of small triumphs: nutritious meals that revived her strength little by little, and the slow process of remembering how to dive efficiently again; one day at a time.

After just over a month of dedicated care, she was finally released. To support her transition back into the wild, woven palm fronds were placed in the water near her, mimicking the floating sargassum beds she might encounter naturally.

*"Watching her glide away, with the fervor of survival lit under her plastron, I felt hope swell in my chest,"* He reflects.



Photo: ORP  
Post-surgery care: Haleema resting and receiving treatment during her steady recovery from the procedure.

Photo: ORP  
Iyaadh carefully monitors Haleema's  
progress in the rehabilitation tanks



## The Heroes Behind the Scenes: A Global Network

Haleema's remarkable recovery is a powerful reminder of what can be achieved through collective effort. For the ORP team, her recovery proves that it truly takes a village to save a sea turtle.

That "village" extends far beyond the beautiful shores of the Maldives. What began as a local field observation of entangled turtles in Maldivian waters has evolved into a structured, highly sophisticated international conservation model. Today, the Olive Ridley Project operates as a global non-profit NGO, powered by a deeply connected network spanning multiple continents and ocean basins.

The true heroes of this initiative are the dedicated professionals working relentlessly behind the scenes. ORP boasts a multidisciplinary team of over 40 marine conservation experts, including marine biologists, dedicated researchers, community leaders, and what is now the largest sea turtle veterinary team in the world. While their field operations remain heavily focused on the Maldives, their

vital work is replicated by permanent teams stationed across Kenya, Oman, Pakistan, and the Seychelles. Furthermore, recognizing that sea turtles are highly migratory global citizens, ORP collaborates with stakeholders in Tunisia, Greece, Cape Verde, and Saudi Arabia to ensure these species are protected throughout their vast journeys.

This multi-layered programme seamlessly combines veterinary care, rigorous marine fieldwork, and vital data collection. Each rescued animal is treated not only as an individual case but also as a critical data point contributing to a much broader ecological understanding. By maintaining a comprehensive research programme focused on marine turtle populations and ecosystem health in the Indian Ocean, these behind-the-scenes researchers address significant scientific data gaps. They utilize long-term monitoring, photographic identification, and health assessments of individual animals to successfully support broader conservation planning on a regional scale.

## A Shared Responsibility

A defining feature of ORP's work is its warm and practical engagement with coastal communities. Rather than operating as a purely external intervention, the organization works within existing economic and social structures. Local fishers are actively involved in ghost gear recovery initiatives and are trained in safe reporting and handling practices for marine wildlife encounters. Community outreach programmes further support awareness of marine pollution, proving that long-term change is more effective when integrated directly into existing livelihoods.

Ultimately, the future of these fragile ecosystems relies heavily on collaborative participation.

*"The one thing we'd like people to know and believe is that their actions matter," Iyaad says. "Take little Haleema's journey for example, every individual act of kindness (no matter how small) gave her a second chance at life"*

As a non-profit NGO, ORP relies on the generous donations of people adopting patients, wild sea turtles, volunteering, participating in citizen science, or simply engaging with their work to help create a safer planet.

*"If we don't act now, their future (and along with it, ours) hangs in the balance," Iyaad reminds us. "With your help, we can rewrite that story".*

In the Maldives, the health of marine ecosystems directly influences the effectiveness and sustainability of maritime activity. The inspiring work of the Olive Ridley Project perfectly demonstrates that operational performance and environmental stewardship are not competing priorities, but deeply interconnected aspects of the exact same system.



*Photo: ORP  
The conservation medicine team who made sure she recovered through daily treatments*

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### AUTHOR

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Photo: Maldives Ports Limited

# Building Connections That Matter: Inside MPL's Badhahi Initiative



Layyina Ali Rasheed  
Administrative Executive, Marketing & PR  
Maldives Ports Limited

Maldives Ports Limited operates as the heart of the nation's maritime industry, facilitating the movement of goods that sustain everyday life across the cluster of islands that make up the nation. Yet, beyond its operational mandate, MPL recognizes a broader responsibility to our port community. A key component of MPL's goal of promoting sustainable growth and development in the Maldives is its dedication to corporate social responsibility.

It is through this framework that Badhahi, MPL's corporate social responsibility initiative, takes shape. Grounded in the idea that communities thrive with connection, care and shared responsibility, the Badhahi program aims to drive positive change across the nation. Its main philosophy represents its Dhivehi namesake: unity. This is what guides MPL's approach towards its community and social responsibility, leading initiatives to bring the community together and create opportunities for growth; for individuals and society as a whole.

In a country where national identity is deeply rooted within its unique geographical setting, connection is inherent to the nation's social and economic fabric. Badhahi program extends MPL's role beyond connecting our nation to the rest of world, to strengthening the connections within our society and contributing to the wellbeing of the people it serves.

## Opening Doors: Awareness, Education and Opportunity

For many, the port is a place of function that exists of necessity but is rarely ever experienced. The vitality of its function therefore often goes amiss. MPL's port visits for students, organized through Badhahi program, creates an opportunity to address this.

A visit to the port facilities such as the Malé Commercial Harbour offers students a unique hands-on experience and allows them to engage with the port operations firsthand. Paired with career advisory sessions, these visits open doors for the youth who are introduced to an industry that plays a central role in the Maldivian economy, while encouraging curiosity about potential career paths.

Outside of its role in getting the youth interested and involved with the port itself, MPL prides itself on its contributions to school infrastructure and initiatives that promote the development and improvement of technical and vocational education in students. These programs aim to provide access and opportunity as well as support for a generation that is informed, skilled, and ready for the future.

This approach extends past just the next generation. MPL has also organized business forums targeted at local business owners and financial institutions to create a dialogue with government representatives on trade and port development opportunities. In partnership with Business Centre Corporation (BCC), Maldives Customs Service, Bank of Maldives, Maldives Islamic Bank (MIB) and State Trading Organization PLC, these forums were held in both the southern and northern hemispheres of the nation, at Fuvahmulah City and with Kulhudhuffushi Ports Limited. Creating spaces for local businesses to engage with one another and with supporting institutions is essential for fostering inclusive economic growth. As the gateway to the Maldivian economy, MPL is proud to facilitate these connections.





### Connecting with the Next Generation

At the heart of Badhahi is a commitment to engaging with young people – not only as future professionals, but as active members of the community.

This is reflected in initiatives that create space for connection outside of a formal setting. One such example is the iftar hosted at Hulhumalé Port for the children and staff of Fiyavathi Orphanage. Accompanied by an evening of activities and engagement, the event provided an opportunity for the children to explore MPL's heavy vehicles and experience the port environment in a hands-on and interactive way.

Aside from the experience itself, such engagements carry deeper value. They create moments of inclusion, exposure, and confidence, offering children the opportunity to step into new environments, and foster a sense of belonging in a wider community. In doing so, Badhahi reinforces the importance of ensuring that opportunities for learning are accessible to all.

Similarly, participation in community celebrations such as Eid Haveeru extends this engagement into the broader public space. At the recent three-day event hosted by the Maldives National Defense Force at Hulhumalé Central Park, MPL organised a range of interactive activities for children, including a coloring area, sand pit, glow-in-the-dark room, rideable vehicles, and a display of heavy machinery. These moments bring together families and communities in a shared space, building meaningful connections within society.

## In Times of Crisis

In a small island nation, moments of need are often felt collectively. MPL's approach to CSR reflects an understanding that responsibility extends more than its planned initiatives. It includes the ability to respond when it matters most.

Amid ongoing challenges in maintaining adequate blood supply in the Maldives, Maldives Ports Limited (MPL) supported the Maldivian Blood Services (MBS) by organizing a blood donation drive. In the current context of the Maldives, where maintaining blood supply remains an ongoing challenge, initiatives such as these bring together employees, partners, and the wider community to respond to an urgent national need.

In addition to this, MPL remains ready to support our community in the face of broader challenges, including environmental and climate-related impacts such as flooding. Since 2024, the Maldives has experienced a noticeable increase in disaster events, particularly those driven by flooding. In recent times, heavy rainfall has caused significant damage to households and infrastructure.

In response, employees of Maldives Ports Limited actively participated in efforts to assist with water drainage across the city during flooding incidents, supporting our community

during difficult conditions. At the same time, MPL's Safety Department took immediate action to manage water accumulation within the West Park and Port Complex areas, ensuring minimal disruption to operations while maintaining safety across these critical zones.

## Guided by Purpose, Grounded in Community

As MPL continues to evolve, Badhahi remains a constant: a guiding principle shaping how the company engages beyond the port. Its strength lies in its simplicity. Whether through expanding access to learning, supporting communities, engaging with youth, or responding in times of need, MPL's approach is grounded in understanding what our community needs.

In a nation built on connection, Badhahi reflects a belief that progress is strongest when it is shared. For Maldives Ports Limited, this means more than bridging our small island nation to the rest of the world, but also connecting our society from within, and strengthening those connections that carry our community forward.



### AUTHOR

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# Port Congestion in the Maldives:

## An Operational Perspective & the Case for Structural Reform



Ali Ahmed  
Director – Agency Service  
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From a shipping agency standpoint, port performance is not an abstract metric but a critical determinant of operational efficiency, service reliability, and overall cost structures. Day-to-day activities—ranging from vessel berthing and cargo handling to maintaining schedule integrity—are directly influenced by the adequacy of port infrastructure and the effectiveness of operational management systems.



In the Maldives, the Malé Commercial Harbour serves as the primary gateway for national trade and remains central to the country's economic activity. However, increasing congestion at the port has emerged as a significant operational challenge for shipping lines and agents. Developed decades ago, the existing infrastructure has not evolved in parallel with the rapid expansion of cargo volumes, tourism, and broader economic growth. This widening gap between capacity and demand has introduced systemic inefficiencies across the maritime logistics chain.

The impact of these constraints is increasingly evident. Importers and exporters are facing higher logistics costs, vessel turnaround times are becoming progressively longer, and the Maldives risks losing competitiveness relative to more efficient regional hubs.

From an operational perspective, the consequences are both measurable and unsustainable. Vessels handling approximately 400–500 TEUs are generally able to complete cargo operations within 3 to 5 days. However, when volumes increase to 1,000–1,100 TEUs, turnaround times can extend beyond 15 to 17 days. Such delays clearly exceed acceptable industry thresholds and indicate structural limitations in port capacity and performance.

These inefficiencies extend beyond individual port calls. Prolonged berthing durations disrupt entire service rotations, undermining schedule reliability and affecting downstream port connections. Equipment utilization is also impacted, as containers remain tied up for extended periods, reducing availability and increasing operational costs across the network.



*Photo: Maldives Ports Limited  
Malé Commercial Harbour*



While the efforts of Maldives Ports Limited to manage operations under these constraints are acknowledged, the current situation underscores the need for comprehensive, long-term solutions rather than incremental adjustments. In this context, addressing congestion within the existing harbour may provide only temporary relief. The geographic and spatial limitations of Malé restrict its ability to accommodate future vessel sizes and projected trade volumes. As such, accelerating the development of the Thilafushi Port Project is not only necessary but strategically imperative.

Equally important is the adoption of an appropriate development and financing model. A Public–Private Partnership (PPP) framework presents a viable pathway, allowing the Government to retain ownership and regulatory oversight while leveraging private sector investment, technical expertise, and operational efficiencies. A concession-based model with clearly defined performance benchmarks—covering berth productivity, vessel turnaround times, and cargo handling efficiency—would help ensure accountability and service quality.

In parallel, the formation of a locally driven business consortium should be encouraged, with a preference for majority Maldivian ownership. Where full domestic financing is not feasible, limited foreign participation—within the range of 15–25% equity—may be considered to support capital mobilization and introduce technical know-how, while preserving national interests.

Comparable models have demonstrated success in regional ports such as the Port of Colombo and Jebel Ali Port, where structured private sector participation has significantly enhanced port capacity, efficiency, and global competitiveness.

As the Thilafushi Port Project progresses, it is essential that the operational realities of the private sector are fully integrated into planning and implementation. While relocation from Malé is expected to ease congestion within the capital, it may also introduce additional inland transport costs and logistical complexities for businesses. Accordingly, transparent communication, clearly defined timelines, and meaningful stakeholder engagement will be critical to ensuring a smooth and effective transition.

The shipping industry remains committed to supporting this process and stands ready to collaborate with relevant authorities to ensure its success. Strong public–private coordination will be fundamental in delivering a port system that is both efficient and future-ready.

Looking ahead, the success of the Thilafushi Port Project will depend on its ability to meet long-term demand—through adequate depth, modern infrastructure, efficient cargo handling systems, and strong connectivity. Getting this right is essential not only for port performance, but for safeguarding the overall efficiency and competitiveness of the Maldives’ maritime trade within regional and global networks.

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#### **AUTHOR**

*Ali Ahmed is a Senior Maritime & Port Operations Professional with nearly three decades of experience, including 27 years serving as General Manager at Maldives Ports Limited. He has built his career managing complex port operations, ensuring safety, compliance and timely cargo movements. He specializes in ship to ship operations, cargo handling, and port efficiency improvement, consistently delivering results that enhance performance and safety standards. He brings a strategic mindset, strengthened by international training in port management, professional shipping practices, and ship brokerage and chartering. Known for his leadership, Ali has successfully guided teams, streamlined logistics processes, and driven operational innovation. His extensive international exposure and commitment to excellence position him as a trusted professional in the global shipping and port management industry.*





Photo: Magnific

Uthandhu

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