

# Japanese foreign minister on future prospects with Maldives: diplomacy, environment protection & sustainable growth

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Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, Taro Kono. PHOTO/JAPANESE EMBASSY

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, Taro Kono, arrived in the Maldives on an official visit Saturday.

The minister is to pay a courtesy call on President Abdulla Yameen and hold bilateral talks with the Maldives' foreign minister Dr Mohamed Asim during his one-day visit.

In an exclusive interview to Mihaaru, Minister Kono shed light on the enduring diplomatic ties between Japan and the Maldives over the past 50 years, and the prospect of Japanese aid to the archipelago in the foreseeable future.

**Q. What do you think of the progress in Japan-Maldives ties over the past 50 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations? What is the significance of the Maldives to Japan? What message does the Japanese government wish to convey to the people of the Maldives?**



Official logo of the 50th anniversary of Japan-Maldives Diplomatic Relations, created by Akira Unno of Japan.

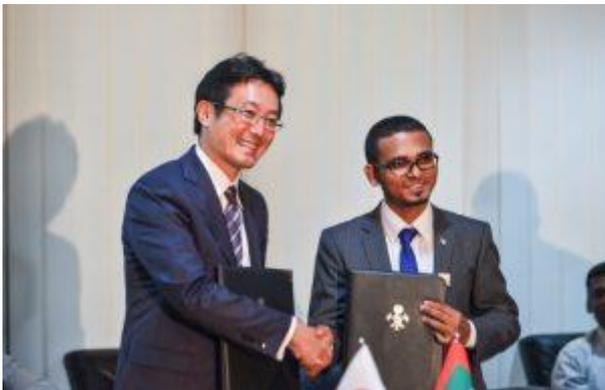
A. Japan places high importance on its relationship with the Maldives situated in a strategic point on the sea lanes of the Indian Ocean, connecting the Asia-Pacific to the Middle East and Africa. Japan and the Maldives have been deepening ties of friendship and cooperation for the half-century since the establishment of diplomatic relations. Many Japanese people admire beautiful seas and abundant nature of the Maldives. Currently 40,000 Japanese tourists visit the Maldives every year. As Japan and the Maldives both face the threat of natural disasters, in particular tsunamis, two countries have worked together hand-in-hand to strengthen cooperation in disaster countermeasures. In order to further strengthen this relationship, I chose the Maldives as one of the first foreign countries to visit in the year of 2018.

Building on our friendly relationship over the past 50 years, Japan intends to further strengthen its relations with the Maldives, a maritime nation, under the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy” which aims at making free and open maritime order, based on the rule of law in the Indo-Pacific region, international public goods to bring stability and equality for all countries.

Specifically, Japan will work further to strengthen regional connectivity through quality infrastructure development and cooperation on maritime security.

Through this kind of cooperation, I would like to emphasize as my message to the people of the Maldives that Japan and the Maldives are partners to develop together and to make contribution together to peace and stability of the region.

**Q. The Japanese government has aided in vital projects to reduce environmental vulnerabilities of the Maldives, a key example being the seawall around capital Male. Does Japan have plans to provide further assistance for environmental protection endeavours in the Maldives?**



Finance Minister Munawar (R) and JICA's chief rep Tanaka sign agreement for Japan to provide USD 25 million as free aid to establish a DTT broadcasting network in the Maldives. PHOTO: HUSSAIN WAHEED/MIHAARU

**A.** As Japan and Maldives are maritime nations, we share recognitions of threat of natural disasters, particularly tsunamis and necessity of countermeasures against them.

Based on our recognition, Japan has provided multifaceted assistance focused on environment, climate change measures, and disaster prevention as one of the priority areas, including construction of a breakwater around Malé, over many years.

For example, as most of the electricity in the Maldives is provided by diesel power generation, Japan has been supporting to introduce solar power generation system in the capital Malé Island since 2010. Reductions in greenhouse effect gas emissions are expected as a result of this.

Furthermore, Japan has been providing assistance for development of terrestrial digital broadcasting network based on Japanese standard in the Maldives. We believe that the broadcasting network can be utilized to transmit disaster information in case of emergency which will lead to the reinforcement of disaster risk management.

Japan will continue to consider further possibility of cooperation through exchanging views with the Government of the Maldives, in order to improve the vulnerabilities of the Maldives in the environmental area.

**Q.** Japanese assistance is one of the most notable in boosting various fields in the Maldives, including education, economy, society and the environment. In the future, what would be the key area of focus with regards to Japanese aid to the Maldives?



Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, Iwao Horii (R), presents disaster reduction equipment on behalf of the Japanese government to the Maldives, received by state defence minister Mohamed Zuhair.

PHOTO/FOREIGN MINISTRY

A. In addition to assistance in the area of environment, climate change measures, and disaster prevention, Japan will provide assistance focused on development of local industries as a priority area.

It aims for the realization of a resilient economic structure, and in particular focuses on the development of the tourism industry, the largest industry in the Maldives, and the fishing industry which has a high development potential.

Specifically, regarding the tourism industry, Japan is focusing on capacity-building in the tourism sector of the Maldives and provides training for tourism promotion through Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). As the Government of the Maldives is taking initiatives to attract more tourists, we would like to provide further support for those initiatives.

Regarding the fishing industry, Japan has supported the formulation of a Master Plan for Sustainable Fisheries that focuses on the abundant fishery resources of the Maldives and encompasses the entire fisheries area. This Plan includes the outcomes of cooperation based on the shared culture of the two countries, such as pole-and-line skipjack tuna fishing.

Through these initiatives, Japan will continue to support the sustainable economic growth of the Maldives.