

MODI'S VISIT TO SIGNAL CHANGE IN TIES

India Hopes to Restart its Projects in Maldives

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New Delhi: India will seek to kick-start its projects in the Maldives during PM Modi's daylong visit to Male on November 17 to attend Ibu Solih's swearing-in ceremony. The projects, including in the defence sector, were stalled under the regime of outgoing President Abdulla Yameen.

Pro-China Yameen had stalled a number of Indian projects, including a training academy for the Maldivian armed forces and demarcation of an exclusive economic zone, people familiar with the Indo-Maldives affairs indicated to **ET**. He had also refused to extend visas for Indian professionals and implement initiatives by India's private sector companies, they said.

Solih, who will be sworn in as the President on November 17, has signalled to bring back 'India First' to Maldives' foreign policy and de-block stalled projects, said one of the people. There are indications that the new government will safeguard India's security interests in the region, including disallowing any Chinese military base in the archi-



pelago nation. Indo-Maldivian defence partnership is now likely to be expanded to cover various areas in the maritime domain.

Yameen had sought to rule the Maldives by sidestepping New Delhi and emphasised that India is not the only option for Male, a person said. His policies, including refusal to extend visas for Indians, gave rise to resentment among locals as they were deprived of Indian doctors and other professionals, he added.

Modi will be the highest ranking foreign leader who has been invited for the swearing-in ceremony. Leaders from Sri Lanka as well as Bangladesh will also be present at the event. New Delhi hopes to host Solih in near future.