



## **BRIGADIER GENERAL IBRAHIM HILMY** MNDF Coast Guard

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Maldives, have a long and eventful history of seafaring and have a significant geographical position between Asia and Africa. Fishing and tourism have historically been the two most important industries for the nation's economy. The Maldives, on the other hand, is working to position itself as a regional maritime hub in order to take advantage of the unrealized potential for maritime trade and logistics. This paper highlights how Maldives is developing up itself as a maritime hub in the Indian Ocean Region.

### **DEVELOPMENT OF IHAVANDHIPOLHU AS A MARITIME HUB**

Maldives is in a strategic location in the center of Indian Ocean Region. Majority of cargo passes through eight-degree channel and one and half degree channel. Annually more than thirty thousand vessels pass through these channels.

Ihavandhipolhu which is located in the north of Maldives will be a major maritime hub in the future. The project comprises of several components supported by the Special Economic Zone Act. On the key shipping routes that connect China and East Asia to Europe and the Middle East, it is proposed to build a transshipment port on the atoll of Ihavandhipolhu, which is situated in the seven to eight-degree channel. After project completion, the port will be able to capitalize on a significant portion of the USD 18 trillion worth of goods transported annually across the channel.

Ihavandhipolhu is also situated in a location that would make an excellent choice for the construction of a dockyard, which would include both floating ship repair and dry-docking capabilities. With more than 15 million barrels of crude oil passing through the 7 to 8-degree channel every day, Ihavandhipolhu is ideally situated for both alongside and offshore

bunkering services, as well as for the storage of crude and refined oil, making it a major fuel exchange hub in the Indian Ocean. Ihavandhipolhu also will offer land to set up duty free mega stores and ware houses. In addition, there are plans to construct a cruise center and a yacht marina in this area. So far this year, more than sixty yachts have arrived at Uligamu. The global shipping industry is

projected to grow at a rate of 7.2% per year, and the market is moving from Europe to Asia. Ihavandhipolhu is in a prime location with ample maneuvering space for the development of a cruise center and yacht marina.

The Ihavandhipolhu project provides potential investors with the chance to establish new resorts in the surrounding area. The Maldives, which is well-known for its high-end tourism, has committed more land to the development of exclusive resorts. In the same region Hanimaadhoo International Airport will be upgraded to meet this demand, allowing travelers to reach their final destination in significantly less time.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF MARITIME HUB IN GREATER MALE' REGION**

The Maldives government has announced its intention to construct a new harbor in GulhiFalhu, close to Malé Island, because of the large number of commercial ships that visit Male. Male port receives more than 1,000 cargo ships on average each year. This will alleviate the harbor on the main island's densely populated six square kilometers, which is home to approximately 150,000 people. The new harbor development is anticipated to generate expansion opportunities.

According to the Strategic Action Plan (SAP) of the government, the Gulhifalhu port in the Maldives will be completed and operational by the end of 2024. Due to the port's close proximity to the capital, the Maldives government is promoting it as a strategic location for manufacturing, warehousing, and distribution facilities. The establishment of an international port in Gulhifalhu will result in substantial economic advantages for the Maldives. The development of the Gulhifalhu port will allow major international shipping lines to operate in the Maldives, which will be extremely advantageous for local businesses. The port will be expanded to accommodate four to five ships simultaneously, which will expedite the transport and clearance of goods, resulting in direct cost reductions for businesses. The development will also result in reduced prices for products. The geographical location of the Maldives is ideal for a transshipment port, given that the country is situated in the center of the major maritime routes in the Indian Ocean. The expansion of Gulhifalhu port will bring new enterprises and industries to the Maldives.

## **UPGRADING VELANA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT**

Given that 99.7% of the Maldives consists of water, the Maldives must link their airport expansion with their maritime gateway. In addition, the majority of tourists travel to their final vacation island by sea, which relates to its sea port development.

Velana International Airport serves as the primary entry point to the Maldives. It is located on the island of Hulhule in the North Male Atoll. The Velana International Airport is undergoing a

significant expansion to accommodate the growing number of passengers. The expansion initiative is intended to accommodate the projected passenger growth of 7.3 million by 2030. The expansion is scheduled to be completed by mid-2024 and is estimated to cost \$800 million.

The 2024 Air Service World Congress is scheduled for July and is anticipated to attract international route development community representatives and provide a forum for discussing the future of global air service development. This is a momentous occasion for the Maldives, as this is the first time they have hosted this prestigious global event.

Maldives also has the largest seaplane fleet in the world, which can transport tourists from Velana International Airport in Malé to final vacation destination. Three hundred to four hundred takeoffs and landings of these seaplanes occur daily from Male. The majority of seaplanes in Maldives are twin-otter DHC-6-300s, also known as de Havilland Twin Otters, which are prevalent aircrafts used for short distance takeoffs and landings. They are compact and efficient and can transport up to 15 passengers securely throughout the more than 1000 islands that are accessible by seaplane in the Maldives.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Maldives has immense potential to establish itself as a maritime hub, capitalizing on its strategic location and expanding tourism industry. With investments in infrastructure, port facilities, logistics, and supportive government policies, the country can attract foreign investment, diversify its economy, and

improve regional connectivity. However, careful planning and sustainable practices must be adopted to address challenges and ensure the long-term viability of the maritime hub.