

**Indian PM Manmohan Singh becomes first Foreign Leader to  
address Maldives Parliament  
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MALE, Nov 13 (NNN-Bername) -- Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was Saturday accorded the unique honour of being the first foreign dignitary to address the multi-party 'People's Majlis' (Maldives' Parliament), after it came into being in 2009, Press Trust of India (PTI) reported.

Majlis Speaker Abdullah Shahid has welcomed him, saying that Maldives has lot to learn from India, a leading economic giant and the largest democracy in the world.

Manmohan, in his speech, said his first visit to Maldives was an unforgettable journey and the memories to the breathtaking beauty and serenity nation will be cherished always.

All the 75 Member of Parliaments of the Parliament also heard the Prime Minister praising the picturesque island nation, and acknowledged the honour given to him.

"I am truly honoured by this gesture accorded to me and my country," PTI quoted him as saying. His wife Gursharan Kaur and Maldivian President Mohammed Nasheed's wife Laila Ali Abdullah were present at the Majlis during the address.

In the speech, Manmohan said extremism and religious fundamentalism are among the common challenges India and Maldives are faced with as the two countries agreed to adopt a multi-pronged approach to deal with these problems.

India's security, like that of the host country, was closely linked to what happens in the Indian Ocean.

"The challenges we face are well known -- extremism and religious fundamentalism, piracy, smuggling and drug trafficking to name a few," he said.

"Our two countries have agreed upon a multi-pronged approach to deal with these problems. To build capacity within Maldives, India will support the construction of a National Police Academy," he said.

India and Maldives have signed agreements on combating terrorism, drug trafficking, disaster management and coastal security and transfer of sentenced persons. These will strengthen the framework of cooperation on law enforcement and consular matters.

Appreciating the impressive strides made by Maldives ever since its independence in 1965, Singh said as an abiding friend, India would always stand by the country in these efforts.

"Our relations are time-tested and I wish to reaffirm that they shall remain so in the future," he said. --NNN-BERNAMA

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