

## Maldives thanks India for help in terror probe

Maldives Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid Monday thanked Prime Minister Manmohan Singh for India's help in probing the bomb blast in Male last month and briefed him about his country's plan to hold multi-party elections next year.

Shahid also told Manmohan Singh about preparations going on in his country to hold the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit next year.

He also sought India's help in building democratic institutions in the Maldives, especially electoral reforms, and discussed ways to enhance cooperation in combating terrorism, an official source told IANS.

Shahid began his visit to India, his first overseas trip, Sunday after becoming foreign minister over a month ago to underscore the special ties of friendship that binds the Maldives, the Indian Ocean island nation known for its pristine coral beaches, and India.

He also met Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee and Leader of the Opposition L.K. Advani and discussed with them an entire gamut of bilateral and regional issues, including ways to promote peace and stability in South Asia.

Maldives President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, Asia's longest serving leader who has been ruling the country for nearly three decades, has unveiled a roadmap to usher in a liberal, modern democracy, albeit one suited to local conditions, next year.

India had strongly condemned the Sep 29 bomb explosion in Male that injured 12 foreign tourists, the first attack of its kind in a country known as a high-end tourist Mecca for Western tourists.

India was 'ready to offer all assistance in investigations as well as medical assistance to the government and the people of Maldives', the external affairs ministry had said in a statement immediately after the blasts that rocked the island nation.

Shahid returns to the Maldivian capital late Monday night.

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