

Maldives builds \$1b airport amid tourism threats

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Dhaka: For decades, the Maldives — scattered across the Indian Ocean southwest of India and Sri Lanka — has lured high-spending travellers from around the globe.

Visitors have long arrived from diverse markets including China, Russia, and Europe, the latter tracing its ties back to the islands' days as a British colony before independence in 1965.

Yet, many regions remain without direct air links to this luxury destination. That is set to change with the completion of a USD 1 billion expansion at Velana International Airport, featuring a new runway and terminal. Built largely by Saudi and Chinese firms, the new facility officially opened on 26 July 2025 after nearly a decade of development.

The Maldives is now looking to those same nations — rather than its traditional European base — to deliver the influx of visitors needed to

justify the investment. Accommodation capacity is ready to welcome more tourists, but the country faces an existential threat: rising sea levels. While the feared damage has not yet materialised, the risk remains, compounded by the fact that the islands offer no high ground in the event of a tsunami.

Ultimately, the success of the Maldives' tourism future will depend not just on infrastructure, but on whether travellers are willing to visit a paradise under environmental threat.

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