

**Unit: 6****Lesson 3: The Maldives****B Now read the text below and answer the questions that follow.**

The Republic of Maldives is an island country in the Indian Ocean. It has 1199 islands that are clustered into 26 major atolls. An atoll is a ring-shaped coral reef or a string of closely spaced coral islands. The natural coral reefs of Maldives surrounded by lagoons make each island stand out as a pearl in the Indian Ocean. The Maldives stand at eighth position amongst the smallest countries in the world with an area of 300 square kilometres only. It is also the smallest Asian country with respect to population and size.



People have been living on the islands of the Maldives from as long as 3000 years ago. They set sail from different parts of the world- Asia, Arabia, Europe and the Americas- to come to these islands. The earliest settlers of the Maldives were probably from southern India and Sri Lanka who came to these islands in the fourth and fifth centuries BC. In the 12th century AD, sailors from East Africa and Arab countries came to the Maldives. As a result, the Maldivians who were originally Buddhists were converted to Sunni Islam in the mid-12th century. In 1344 Ibn Batuta, a famous Arab historian and scholar travelled around the Maldives.

In the 16th century, the Portuguese conquered the Maldives and they ruled the country for 15 years. Although governed as an independent Islamic sultanate for most of its history from 1153 to 1968, the Maldives was a British colony from 1887 to 1965. Following independence from Britain in 1965, the sultanate continued to operate for another 3 years. On November 11, 1968, it was abolished and replaced by a republic and the country assumed its present name.

The Maldives is famous as a tourist destination because of its enjoyable weather, heavenly beaches and lagoons, luxurious holiday resorts and the peace-loving people. Being an island country, it enjoys a pleasant weather throughout the year. The Maldives has been ranked as the best country brand for beach, rest and relaxation in 2008.

The Maldives is well known for being the lowest country in the world. Unfortunately, this small country with idyllic natural beauty is under threat from rising sea levels due to global warming. Most of the country is just 1.5 metres above sea level with a highest point of 2.3 metres! Many predictions have been made with respect to Maldives being swept away by the rising water level in the Indian Ocean. It was even seen during the tsunami of 2004, that many of the island's dry parts were flooded by waters shrinking the island. The government of the Maldives has begun to purchase land from nearby countries in case the islands go under water!



In order to highlight the threats of global warming to its low-lying islands, the government of Maldives held a cabinet meeting underwater in 2009. That was the first ever cabinet meeting in the world that took place underwater. The meeting took place about 5 meters underwater, in a blue-green lagoon on a small island. While underwater, the cabinet signed a document calling on all nations to cut their carbon emissions.