

MALDIVES EXPERIENCING ANOTHER EPISODE OF CORAL BLEACHING

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Tourism, the largest economic industry in the Maldives thrives due to its exotic and beautiful underwater life with stunning coral reefs. This tiny nation comprising of around 2000 fascinating coral reefs are a delight for scuba divers and people who love marine life in general.

The whitening of corals in the Maldives has once again become the hot topic among local and foreign researchers and marine biologists.

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Many such expertise believe that the Maldives is experiencing the worst case of coral bleaching since the 1998 El Nino event, in which 90 percent of the nation's corals were severely affected, with damage in some areas recorded to have extended to a dazzling 98 percent.



According to Hussein Zahir of Marine Research Centre the temperatures this year were following similar patterns to those of 1998, with a surface temperature in April of one degree above the long term average. As per his estimates 10-15 percent shallow water corals have now become completely white, while 50-70 percent is on the verge, having become pale. However the recent drop in temperature, brought on by rain and the onset of the southwest monsoon, has lowered the surface sea temperature and brought some relief, “and may give the coral time to recover.”



Coral bleaching happens when rising water temperatures force the coral polyps to shed the algae (zooxanthellae) that give them their color, and which are necessary for their survival. When the algae leave the coral polyp and enter the water column, it causes the coral to lose its color and it eventually dies.

The recovery of the reefs takes a very long time, although it is possible. Recent coral propagation techniques reveal that the process of coral recovery can be accelerated by introducing the coral to areas where new corals are needed. This means that we can take the damaged corals further down, let them recover and bring them up later.

Scientists are also looking for methods of growing heat-resistant corals that would be less vulnerable to climate change.

Surrounded by the vast expanse of sea and sprawling sandy beaches, the islands of the Maldives are a natural enchantment for many viewers. Coral reefs which surround each and every island of this tropical wonder furnish exquisite natural barriers which are fundamental in protecting the white sandy beaches and contribute enormously to sand formation. Coral reefs are also home to many sea animals and plants. Thus protecting these delicate ecosystems becomes a necessity for a sustainable and better future of the nation.

References:

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