

27° to 28° Celsius, while in the higher elevations of the central highlands the average temperatures are considerably cooler, around 15° Celsius.

### **2.3 Geography of the Maldives**

The Maldives is a group of atolls in the Indian Ocean south-southwest of India near the equator. The land area of the Maldives is approximately 300 km<sup>2</sup>. It extends approximately 820 km from north to south and 130 km east to west. The northern tip of the Maldives is just north of 7° N Lat. and the southern tip is just south of the equator. The Maldives is centered at approximately 73° East Longitude.

Figure 2.4 is a political map of the Maldives that shows the major cities and the 20 administrative atolls. The population of Maldives is around 320,000 (2002). The capital of the Maldives and largest city is Male', with a population of approximately 81,000.

There are 1,190 islands grouped in clusters of 26 atolls. Most atolls consist of a large, ring-shaped coral reef supporting numerous islands. The islands are composed of live coral reefs and sand bars. The islands average 1 to 2 km<sup>2</sup> in area, and between 1 and 1.5 m above mean sea level in height. The highest point in the Maldives is an unnamed location on the Wilingili Island in the Addu Atoll at 2.4 m. The longest island is Hithadhoo at 8 km in the Addu Atoll. Each atoll has approximately five to ten inhabited islands and approximately 20 to 60 uninhabited islands. Overall, approximately 200 of the islands are inhabited.

### **2.4 Climate of the Maldives**

The Maldives has an equatorial climate with high humidity and average temperatures between 27° and 29° Celsius all year. Because of the Maldives' proximity to the equator, the monsoon seasons are not as well defined as they are in Sri Lanka. The monsoons are best defined in the northern part of the country. This region has distinct monsoon seasons including the strong southwest monsoon from June through September and a noticeable northeast monsoon from December through February. However, at the southern end of the Maldives on Addu Atoll, there is not as strong a monsoon signal with winds speeds fairly uniform throughout the year. The average annual precipitation ranges increase from north to south with between 1500 mm and 2000 mm in the northern part of the country to around 2500 mm at Gan Island on the Addu Atoll.

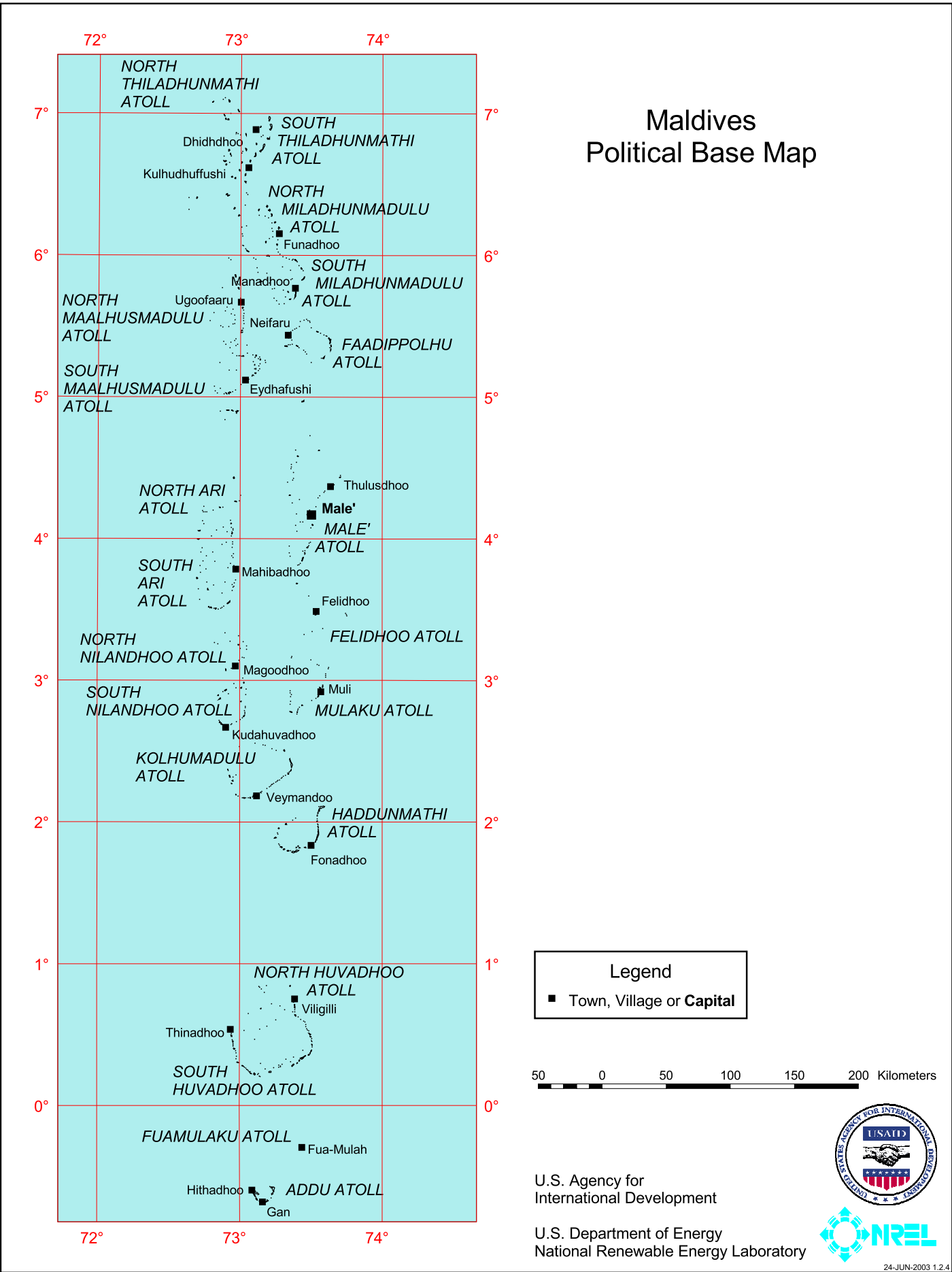


Figure 2-4