



Katchatheevu Island

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Why in News?

Recently, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister revived the debate over the [Katchatheevu](#), a longstanding point of contention **between India and Sri Lanka**, particularly with regard to fishing rights and sovereignty over the uninhabited island.



What are the Highlights of the Katchatheevu Issue?

- **Historical Background:**
 - Katchatheevu is a **285-acre uninhabited speck in the Palk Strait, between India and Sri Lanka**, an island located about 14 nautical miles off Rameswaram, India.
 - In 1974, **Prime Ministers Indira Gandhi of India and Sirima R.D. Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka** signed an agreement that **recognized Katchatheevu as part of Sri Lanka's territory**, resulting in a change of ownership.

- The agreement also allowed **Indian fishermen to fish around the island, dry their nets on it, and permitted Indian pilgrims to visit the Catholic shrine located on the island.**
- **Fishing Rights and Livelihood:**
 - Fisherfolk from both India and Sri Lanka have historically used Katchatheevu for fishing. Though this feature was acknowledged in the 1974 agreement, the supplemental pact was signed in 1976.
 - The 1976 agreement was aimed at **defining maritime boundaries and exclusive economic zones for both countries**, while also imposing restrictions on fishing vessels and fishermen from either nation, **prohibiting fishing in each other's waters without explicit permission** from either of the two countries.
- **Indian Government Stance and Legal Aspects:**
 - The Indian government, in 2013, stated that the **question of retrieval did not arise as no Indian territory was ceded.**
 - The issue was framed as a dispute between **British India and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), resolved through agreements in 1974 and 1976.**
 - The Union government asserted that **Katchatheevu lies on the Sri Lankan side of the India-Sri Lanka International Maritime Boundary Line.**
- **Political and Public Sentiment:**
 - The transfer of Katchatheevu triggered **opposition and debates in both Indian Houses of Parliament.**
 - Leaders of Tamil Nadu have periodically raised the demand for the island's retrieval.
 - The demand evolved over the years, with suggestions of a "lease in perpetuity (a lease deed in which no specified time period)" for the island.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Elephant Pass, sometimes seen in the news, is mentioned in the context of the affairs of which one of the following? (2009)

- (a) Bangladesh
- (b) India
- (c) Nepal
- (d) Sri Lanka

Ans: (d)

Mains

Q. In respect of India-Sri Lanka relations, discuss how domestic factors influence foreign policy. (2013)

Q. 'India is an age-old friend of Sri Lanka.' Discuss India's role in the recent crisis in Sri Lanka in the light of the preceding statement. (2022)