

Chinese Military Expansion on Antelope Reef

Prelims: Current events of national and international importance | Geography

Why in News?

Satellite imagery reveals new military-grade construction on Yagong Island, security analysts identify as China's largest artificial island and military base development at nearby Antelope Reef.

Key Findings

- **Yagong Island Installation** - Satellite imagery shows a newly constructed 3-pronged facility on **Yagong Island**, may be an early warning radar facility or standalone observation post.
- **Antelope Reef Mega-Base** - The construction at Yagong Island supports a massive 1,500-acre artificial island developed at Antelope Reef.
- It features a **6 km long structure** with a 3 km straight coastline suitable for a military airfield runway and deep-water berthing quays.
- **Timeline of Reclamation** - Land reclamation and dredging at Antelope Reef and Yagong Island began in early 2026, progressing rapidly to complete Phase-1 operations.
- **Strategic Intent** - Expands China's **Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD)** capability, extending its radar coverage and air defence umbrella south of Hainan Island over the northern sector of the South China Sea.
- China claims the developments are intended for civilian purposes, such as maritime safety, weather forecasting, fisheries protection, and scientific research.
- **Territorial Contestants** - Claimed by China, Vietnam, and Taiwan.



About the Paracel Islands (Xisha Islands)

- **Geographic Grouping** - Comprises over 30 islets, sandbars, and reefs divided into two main clusters
 - The Crescent Group in the west and
 - The Amphitrite Group in the east.
- **Historical Control** - China has maintained physical control of the entire Paracel archipelago since **1974**, following a naval conflict in which it forcibly seized holdings from the navy of South Vietnam.
- **Strategic Importance** - Positioned near vital international shipping lanes, serving as a forward protective buffer for China's primary submarine and naval bases located on Hainan Island (Sanya Port / Yulin Naval Base).

Reference

[Reuters | New installations emerge on islet as China](#)



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