

Katchatheevu Island Dispute

Why in news?

Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi mentioned the island of Katchatheevu during No Confidence debate in the Parliament.

What is the history of Katchatheevu Island?

- **Location-** Katchatheevu is an uninhabited off-shore island in the *Palk Strait* which was formed due to *volcanic eruptions* in the 14th century.
- It is no more than 1.6 km in length and slightly over 300 m wide at its broadest point.
- It lies northeast of Rameswaram (India) and southwest of Jaffna (Sri Lanka).
- ***St. Anthony Church*** is an early 20th century Catholic shrine and the only structure in the island.



What is the Maritime Boundary Agreement about?

- Fishermen of both countries have been fishing in each other's waters without conflict for a very long time.
- The issue emerged when both the countries signed these Agreements in 1974-76.
- The 1974 agreement was to fix the maritime boundary in the Palk Strait.
- **1974 Agreement** - Each country shall have sovereignty and exclusive jurisdiction and control over the waters, the islands, the continental shelf and the subsoil, falling on its own side of the aforesaid boundary.
- Only navigational rights of the vessels of both Sri Lanka and India over each other's waters have been preserved.

Allowed activities for Indian fisherman in the island	Prohibited activities for Indian fisherman in the island
Resting and net drying Visit the annual St. Anthony's festival without the need of visa	The fishing vessels and fishermen of India shall not engage in fishing in the historic waters, the territorial sea and the Exclusive Economic Zone of Sri Lanka

- **1976 Agreement** - Each Party shall respect rights of navigation through its territorial sea and exclusive economic zone in accordance with its laws and regulations and the rules of international law.
- It marked the international maritime boundary of India and Sri Lanka *without consulting the Tamil Nadu State Assembly*.

What is the conflict about?

- **Fish depletion** - Indian fishermen continued trespassing the Sri Lankan water boundary, searching for better catch in the area.
- The problem turned serious when fish and aquatic life in the Indian continental shelf depleted.
- They are also using modern fishing trolleys which harm marine life and the ecosystem.
- **Frequent arrests and killings** - Sri Lankan authorities said that they are protecting their maritime boundaries against poaching, and securing the livelihood of Sri Lankan fishermen.
- Both sides ensure to not use force under any circumstances. However, the violent situation remains the same.
- In 2009, Sri Lanka started heavily guarding its maritime boundary in the Palk Strait to reduce the possibility of the return of [Tamil insurgents](#) in the country.

What is Tamil Nadu's position on Katchatheevu island?

- Tamil Nadu cited the *historical control of the Ramnad zamindari* over the island and traditional fishing rights of Indian Tamil fishermen.
- The island was given away to Sri Lanka *without consulting* the State Legislative Assembly.
- In 1991, the Tamil Nadu Assembly adopted a resolution demanding the retrieval of Katchatheevu.
- In 2008, Tamil Nadu filed a petition in court saying Katchatheevu could not be ceded to another country without a constitutional amendment.
- In 2012, the State approached Supreme Court to expedite the issue in the wake of increasing arrests of Indian fishermen by Sri Lanka.

What is India's stand?

- Union government argued that since the island had always been under dispute, "no territory belonging to India was ceded nor sovereignty relinquished."
- According to the agreement, the *Island lies on the Sri Lankan side* of the India-Sri Lanka International Maritime Boundary Line.
- The government has raised the issue at the highest political level with Sri Lanka.
- The matter is still pending in the Supreme Court of India.

References

1. [Indian Express- Katchatheevu hot button political issue](#)
2. [Ministry of External Affairs- Government's stand on the island](#)