

## Scarborough Shoal (Bajo de Masinloc)

*Prelims: Current events of national & International importance | World Geography*

### Why in News?

Recent satellite imagery confirms China's deployment of floating barriers and a naval blockade at the entrance of Scarborough Shoal, escalating tensions in the South China Sea.

### Scarborough Shoal

- **Feature** - It is a ***triangular-shaped coral atoll*** formed on an underwater volcanic mount.
- **Classification**- It is defined as a ***high-tide feature (not an island)***, consisting of a chain of reefs and rocks surrounding a central lagoon.
- With a shallow lagoon it is the largest atoll in the South China Sea, covering around 150 sq. km
- **Location** - Situated in the eastern South China Sea, it lies approximately 120 nautical miles (within the EEZ) west of Luzon, Philippines, and roughly 470 nautical miles from mainland China.
- **Nomenclature** - Locally known in the Philippines as Bajo de Masinloc and in China as Huangyan Island.

### Territorial Claims

- **Philippines** - Claims sovereignty based on proximity and its position within its 200-nautical-mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) under ***United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)***
- **China** - Claims the shoal as historical territory via the controversial "**Nine-Dash Line**" (often cited now as "historical rights").
- It is known as Huangyan Island (China) and Panatag Shoal / Bajo de Masinloc (Philippines)
- **Taiwan** - Maintains a claim similar to China's. Hence a disputed Area.
- **2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) Ruling** - The tribunal ruled that China's "historical rights" lacked legal basis and the blockade violated international law. However, China maintains **de facto control** since the 2012 standoff.

### Strategic Concerns

- **Militarization** - China utilizes its Maritime Militia (armed fishing trawlers) and Coast Guard to maintain a persistent presence and install floating barriers.
- **Legal Pretext** - The establishment of a "national nature reserve" by China is viewed

as a precursor to permanent occupation and potential artificial island construction.

- **Defense Treaties** - The shoal is a critical flashpoint that could invoke the U.S.-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty in the event of an armed attack on Philippine assets.

### **Socio-Economic Impact**

- **Fisheries** - It is a traditionally rich fishing ground. The blockade has led to significant economic distress for Filipino fishing communities in provinces like Zambales.
- **Geopolitics** - Persistent blockades test the limits of the Manila-Washington alliance, especially during periods of global geopolitical distraction.

### **Reference**

[The Hindu | Scarborough Shoal](#)

