

# **Chagos Archipelago and Diego Garcia Island**

### Source: IE

## Why in News?

Recently, the **<u>United Kingdom (UK)</u>** agreed to cede **sovereignty** of the strategically important <u>Chagos</u> <u>Archipelago</u> to Mauritius.

However, the UK will continue to exercise sovereign rights over <u>Diego Garcia</u> island.

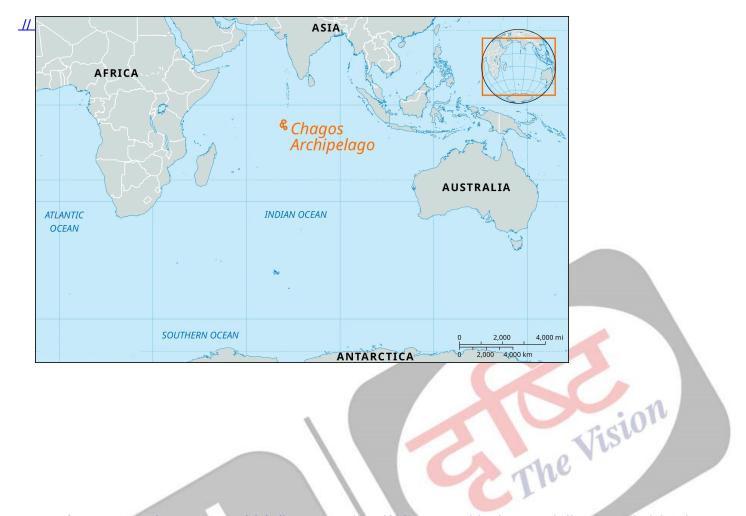
## What are the Key Facts Regarding the Chagos Archipelago?

- Geography of the Chagos Archipelago: It consists of 58 islands and is located approximately 500 km south of the Maldives in the <u>Indian Ocean</u>.
- History of the Chagos Archipelago: The French were the first to colonize Mauritius along with the Chagos Islands in 1715.
  - In the late 18th century, the French brought in <u>slave labour</u> from Africa and India to work in newly established <u>coconut plantations</u>.
  - However, the UK took control of the region in 1814 after the fall of France's <u>Napoleon</u> <u>Bonaparte.</u>
  - In **1965**, the UK constituted the **British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT)**, of which the Chagos Islands were a central part.
- Mauritius' Claims Over Chagos: Chagos was attached to Mauritius, another British colony in the Indian Ocean, for administrative purposes.
  - When Mauritius gained independence in 1968, Chagos remained with Britain, which gave Mauritius a 3 million pound grant for the "detachment."
- Strategic Importance of Chagos and Diego Garcia: In 1966, Britain signed an agreement with the United States to use the BIOT for military purposes.
  - Subsequently, the **plantation** on Diego Garcia was **shut down** and it became unlawful for a person to enter or remain in Diego Garcia without a permit.
  - Diego Garcia, the largest in the archipelago, became a fully operational military base in **1986.**
  - It was a key location in the US overseas "war on terror" operations following al-Qaeda's
    September 11 attacks on the US in 2001.
- International Pressure on the UK: In 2019, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an advisory opinion that asked the United Kingdom to unconditionally withdraw its colonial administration from the area within six months.
  - The ICJ ruled that the **1965 detachment** of Chagos from Mauritius before its independence was **illegal.**

## What are the Key Details of the UK-Mauritius Agreement?

- Sovereignty Over Chagos: The deal grants Mauritius full sovereignty over the archipelago except <u>Diego Garcia</u> island.
- **Resettlement of Chagossians:** Mauritius can now **resettle people** on the Chagos Archipelago, except Diego Garcia, where **Britain evicted 2,000 islanders** for a US naval base.
- Trust Fund: The UK has also promised to create a new trust fund for the benefit of the people of

Chagos.



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