



Katchatheevu Island

[Source: IE](#)

Why in News?

The [Katchatheevu Island](#) has garnered attention for its role in the [India-Sri Lanka relationship](#) and the contentious **fishing rights issue**, showcasing the complexities of maritime boundary disputes and fishing rights in the area.

What is Dispute Related to Katchatheevu Island?

▪ About:

- **Katchatheevu** is a 285-acre uninhabited island in the [Palk Strait](#) between India and Sri Lanka.
- Located northeast of **Rameswaram**, approximately 33 km from the Indian coast, it sits about 62 km southwest of **Jaffna**, at the northern tip of Sri Lanka.
- Katchatheevu is **not suited for permanent human settlement** as there is no source of drinking water on the island.
 - The island's **sole structure is St. Anthony's church**, an early 20th-century Catholic shrine, where Christian priests from India and Sri Lanka conduct an **annual festival service** attended by devotees from both countries.

▪ History of island:

- **Origin:** The Island was formed as a result of [volcanic eruption](#) in the 14th-century.
- **Early Rulers:** The region was initially ruled by the **Jaffna kingdom** of Sri Lanka in the early medieval period, but control later shifted to the **Ramnad zamindari** under **Nayak dynasty of Madurai** in the 17th century.
- **Dispute:**
 - **India:** The ownership dispute over Katchatheevu between India and Sri Lanka, which had been part of the [Madras Presidency](#) during the British Raj, persisted until 1974, with both countries claiming the island as their own.
 - **Sri Lanka:** Sri Lanka claimed sovereignty over Katchatheevu on the ground that the **Portuguese** who had occupied the island during **1505-1658 CE** had exercised **jurisdiction** over the islet.
- **1974:** Under Indo-Sri Lankan Maritime Agreement the island's transfer to Sri Lanka occurred.
- **1976:** An additional agreement was made that prevented both countries from fishing in each other's [Exclusive Economic Zones](#), with **Katchatheevu** positioned at the boundary of these zones, **causing ambiguity over fishing rights**.
- **2009:** After Sri Lanka's civil war ended in 2009, tensions escalated over Indian fishermen entering Sri Lankan waters, leading to **arrests**, allegations of **custodial torture**, and renewed retrieval demands regarding Katchatheevu.
- **Contentious Issues:**
 - The 1974 agreement permitted Indian fishermen to continue accessing Katchatheevu.
 - Due to **differing interpretation** of the agreement by both sides, it **failed to resolve** the fishing rights issue, with Sri Lanka **limiting Indian fishermen's access** to activities such as resting, drying nets, and visiting the Catholic shrine

without visa.



What has been the Stand of the Various Stakeholder on the Issue?

- **Tamil Nadu's Stand:**
 - **In 1973**, then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu had urged centre to retain Kachchatheevu, stating it belonged to India and not just Tamil Nadu.
 - **In 1991**, the issue **resurfaced** when the then Chief Minister called for its **retrieval** later modifying her demand to a **perpetual lease** of the Island with both Chief Minister and Leader of Opposition approaching the Supreme Court.
- **Union Government's Stand:**
 - **2013:** The Union government informed the [Supreme Court](#) that the issue of reclaiming Kachchatheevu from Sri Lanka was irrelevant **as no Indian territory was relinquished**, citing historical disputes settled by agreements in 1974 and 1976.
 - **2022:** However, the Union government, while referring to the two agreements, pointed out in its reply in the Rajya Sabha that Kachchatheevu **"lies on the Sri Lankan side of the India-Sri Lanka International Maritime Boundary Line."**
 - The matter is **still sub judice** in the **Supreme Court**.

Other maritime disputes of India with Neighbouring Nations

- **With Pakistan:** Over demarcation of boundary along [Sir Creek](#).
- **With Bangladesh:** New Moore Island in Bay of Bengal (Permanent Court of Arbitration ruled in favour of Bangladesh).

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. Consider the following statements: (2020)

1. The value of Indo-Sri Lanka trade has consistently increased in the last decade.
2. "Textile and textile articles" constitute an important item of trade between India and Bangladesh.
3. In the last five years, Nepal has been the largest trading partner of India in South Asia.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (b)

Q. Which of the following is geographically closest to Great Nicobar? (2017)

- (a) Sumatra
- (b) Borneo
- (c) Java
- (d) Sri Lanka

Ans: (a)

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)