



CAIER045

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Why in the News?

Sri Lankan fishermen protested against Indian fishermen for alleged poaching in Sri Lankan waters

Protests involved sailing to the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL)

INTERNATIONAL MARITIME BOUNDARY LINE AND KACCHATHEEVU ISSUE

Key issues

Three Interrelated Facets

Disagreements over Kachchatheevu island

Poaching by Indian fishermen in Sri Lankan waters

Use of trawlers causing environmental damage

Indian Fishermen's View

Fishing in traditional grounds, particularly around Kachchatheevu

Climate change and depletion of fish stocks on the Indian side driving them further out to sea

Perspectives

Sri Lankan Accusations

Trespassing into territorial seas

Recent Incidents

In 2023, 240 Indian fishermen were arrested for alleged poaching

35 trawlers were seized by Sri Lankan authorities

About International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL)

Delineation

Defined by the 1974 Maritime Boundary Agreement

Located in the Palk Strait

Principles

Based on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

Marine boundaries follow a medial line equidistant from coastal areas of neighboring countries

Establishes exclusive economic zones, territorial waters, and other maritime zones

Purpose

Aims to prevent disputes and conflicts over maritime jurisdiction



INTERNATIONAL MARITIME BOUNDARY LINE AND KACCHATHEEVU ISSUE

Why in News?

Sri Lankan fishermen protested against alleged poaching by Indian fishermen near the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL).

Issues Underpinning the Dispute

1. Katchatheevu Island Disagreement:

- A 285-acre volcanic island, ceded to Sri Lanka under the 1974 maritime boundary agreement, is at the heart of the dispute.
- Indian fishermen view it as part of their traditional fishing grounds, while Sri Lanka asserts sovereignty.

2. Alleged Poaching:

- Indian fishermen often venture into Sri Lankan waters near the Palk Strait, citing:
 - Climate change and depleting fish stocks on the Indian side.
 - Proximity to rich fishing grounds like Wadge Bank.
- Sri Lanka accuses Indian trawlers of:
 - Illegal fishing within its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).
 - Causing environmental damage through destructive bottom trawling.

3. Arrests and Seizures: In 2023, Sri Lanka arrested 240 Indian fishermen and seized 35 trawlers for illegal fishing.

The Katchatheevu Issue

Historical Context:

- **1974 Agreement:** Transferred Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka, recognizing its maritime sovereignty.
 - Allowed Indian fishermen:
 - Rights to rest, dry nets, and participate in the annual St. Anthony Church festival.
- **1976 Agreement:**
 - Restricted Sri Lankan fishing rights over Wadge Bank, a critical and strategic fishing zone.
 - Prohibited Sri Lankan vessels from fishing in Indian waters except under specific conditions.

Major Concerns

1. **Environmental Damage:** Indian trawlers disrupt marine ecosystems with unsustainable fishing practices, impacting biodiversity.
2. **Livelihood Challenges:** Overfishing and declining stocks increase competition for resources, exacerbating tensions.



3. **Legal and Security Issues:** Frequent arrests and confiscation of vessels strain diplomatic ties and affect coastal livelihoods.
4. **Unresolved Sovereignty Claims:** Indian fishermen's historical association with Katchatheevu fuels their demand for a review of the 1974 agreement.

Way Forward

Short-Term Solutions:

1. **Strengthened Bilateral Mechanisms:** Revive joint working groups to address maritime violations and improve fisheries management.
2. **Enforcement of Guidelines:** Promote awareness among Indian fishermen about IMBL restrictions and the consequences of violations.

Long-Term Strategies:

1. **Sustainable Fisheries Management:**
 - Encourage deep-sea fishing and reduce dependency on trawlers.
 - Invest in marine conservation programs and alternative livelihoods.
2. **Amending Agreements:** Revisit the 1974 accord to address Indian fishermen's grievances while respecting Sri Lanka's sovereignty.
3. **Joint Development Zones:** Explore the feasibility of shared maritime zones to enable cooperative and sustainable resource utilization.

Conclusion:

Addressing the India-Sri Lanka maritime dispute requires a balance between environmental sustainability, livelihood security, and diplomatic cooperation, fostering long-term peace and mutual prosperity in the region.

Do you know?

International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) between India-Sri Lanka

- **Defined by:** 1974 and 1976 India-Sri Lanka maritime agreements.
- **Governed by:** Principles under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS):
 - Equidistance principle: A boundary equidistant from the coasts of neighboring countries.
 - Article 15 of UNCLOS: Allows deviations from the equidistance rule by mutual agreement.