

## Today's Prelims Topics

### SC asks centre to form policy on Sacred Groves

#### Context

The Supreme Court of India has directed the Union government to develop a comprehensive policy for the governance and management of sacred groves, emphasizing their ecological importance

#### About Sacred Groves

- Sacred groves are patches of natural vegetation protected for their religious, cultural or ecological significance.
- These areas are often associated with deities, spirits or religious beliefs, and human interference is generally prohibited or restricted.
- India has over **13,000** documented Sacred Groves.
- They are protected under the **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972**.
- **Some Famous Sacred Groves of India:**
  - **Hariyali:** This is one of the largest sacred groves of India, located near Gauchar in Chamoli District of Uttarakhand.
  - **Deodar grove:** located in Shipin near Simla in Himachal Pradesh.
- **Guidelines of Supreme Court:**
  - The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) will conduct a nationwide survey.
  - The survey should identify the area, location and extent of sacred groves in each state.
  - Boundaries of sacred groves should remain flexible to accommodate natural growth but must be strictly protected against any reduction due to agricultural activities, human habitation or deforestation.

#### Local Names of Sacred Groves

State	Local Name	State	Local Name
Haryana	Kovil Kadu	Meghalaya	Kaw Kyntang
Himachal Pradesh	Dev Van	Manipur	Umang Lai
Rajasthan	Orans	Assam	Than
Maharashtra	Devrai	Kerala	Kavu
Madhya Pradesh	Sarna, Dev	Karnataka	Devarakadu

#### Source:

- [The Hindu - Formulate policy to manage sacred groves, SC tells govt.](#)
- [Indian Express](#)

## Persistent Organic Pollutants

### Context

A decade-long study reveals the severe impact of persistent organic pollutants on **Orcas (Killer Whale)**, even in remote oceans.

### About Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs)

- POPs are organic compounds that are resistant to degradation through chemical, biological, and photolytic processes.
- **POPs are chemicals of global concern** due to their potential for:
  - long-range transport,
  - persistence in the environment,
  - ability to **bio-magnify & bio-accumulate** in ecosystems,
  - Have significant negative effects on human health & the environment.
- POPs **do not break down easily**, they remain in the environment for decades, travel over great distances through water and wind and later get **ingrained in the food chain**.
- **Common examples of POPs:** Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT), Endosulfan, Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB) etc.

### Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants

- It is an international environmental treaty that aims to protect human health and the environment from the harmful effects of POPs
- It was **adopted in 2001** and came into effect in **2004**.
- India ratified the Stockholm convention in **2006**.
- India has **banned the manufacture, use and import of most pesticides** that are listed as POPs in the convention.

### Source:

- [Down to Earth - Inescapable threat](#)

## Foreigners' entry restricted in Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland

### Context

The Union Home Ministry has reimposed the Protected Area Regime (PAR) in Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram to monitor the movement of foreigners.

### About Protected Area Regime (PAR)

- A special permit required for non-Indian citizens to visit certain protected areas near India's international borders.
- Foreigners visiting the three northeastern States would have to seek prior permission and special permits from the government.
- It is issued under the **Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958**.
- The relaxation has been withdrawn after a gap of 14 years. It was initially relaxed for a year in **2010** to promote tourism.
- Protected areas are broader than the Inner Line areas.

### Inner Line Permit (ILP)

- A document required by Indian citizens to enter certain states, introduced under the **Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act, 1873**.
- **Regions Covered: Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Manipur.**
- **Purpose:**
  - To protect indigenous communities and their land rights.
  - To regulate the movement of people into tribal areas.

### Source:

- [The Hindu - Foreigners' entry restricted in Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland](#)

## India Conducts First-ever Ganges River Dolphin Tagging in Assam

### Context

Recently a team of wildlife conservationists tagged the Ganges river dolphin for the first time.

### About Ganges River Dolphin



- It was declared as India's **National Aquatic Animal** in 2009.
- It is one of the **4 freshwater dolphin species in the world**. Other 3 are the **baiji (Yangtze river)**, **bhulan (Indus, Pakistan)** and the **boto (Amazon River)**.
- **Features:**
  - Long, pointed snout with sharp teeth.
  - Poor eyesight; relies on echolocation to navigate and hunt.
  - **It can live only in Freshwater**
  - Females are larger than males and give birth to one calf every two to three years.
  - Dolphins can not breathe in the water. It surfaces every 30-120 seconds to breathe in fresh air as it is a **mammal**.
- **Distribution:** It is found in the Ganga, Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems in **India, Nepal and Bangladesh**.
- **Dolphin Sanctuary:** Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary in Bihar.
- **Conservation Status:**
  - **IUCN Status:** Endangered
  - **CITES:** Appendix I
  - **Wildlife Protection Act (WPA):** Schedule I
- **Threats:**
  - **Habitat Degradation:** Pollution from industries, agriculture etc. & construction of dams and barrages also fragment habitats, reducing population connectivity.
  - **Water Abstraction:** Excessive withdrawal of water for agriculture and industry impacts river flow.
  - **Riverbed Alteration:** Sand mining and dredging disrupt habitats.

### Source:

- [PIB- India Conducts First-ever Ganges River Dolphin Tagging in Assam](#)

## Modi-led panel meets to select next NHRC chief

### Context

Recently a high-power committee led by the Prime Minister met to select the next Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). The post of Chairperson **has been vacant** since Justice (Retd) Arun Kumar Mishra completed his tenure in June 2024.

### About National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)

- It is a **statutory body** set up under the **Protection of Human Rights Act (PHRA), 1993**.
- It is the **watchdog of human rights** in the country & works to **protect the right to life, liberty, equality and dignity of the individual** guaranteed by the Constitution.
- **Composition: Chairperson, 5 full-time Members.**
  - **Chairperson:** Should be **retired Chief Justice of India** or a Judge of the Supreme Court.
  - **Members:**
    - A serving or retired judge of the Supreme Court as a member.
    - A serving or retired Chief justice of a High Court as a member.
    - 3 other members (out of which **at least one should be a woman**) having knowledge or practical experiences with respect to Human Rights.

### Did you Know

- In addition to these permanent members, the Commission also has **7 ex-officio members:**
  - The Chairperson of National Commission for Minorities
  - The Chairpersons of NCSC, NCST and NCBC
  - The Chairperson of National Commission for Women and National Commission for Protection of Child Rights
  - Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities
- **Tenure: 3 years** or till the age of **70 years** for both the Chairperson and Members.
- **Appointment:** The Chairperson and members of the NHRC are appointed by the **President of India**, on the recommendation of a committee consisting of:
  - The Prime Minister (**Chairperson**)
  - The Home Minister
  - The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha
  - The Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha
  - The Speaker of the Lok Sabha
  - The Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha

**UPSC PYQ**

**Q.** Consider the following organisations/ bodies in India: **(2023)**

1. The National Commission for Backward Classes
2. The National Human Rights Commission
3. The National Law Commission
4. The National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission

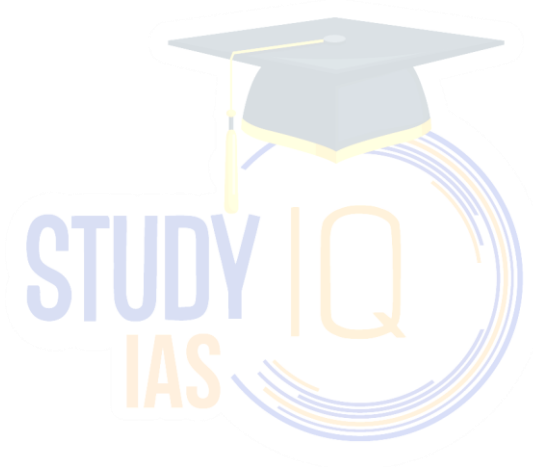
How many of the above are constitutional bodies?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

**Answer: A**

**Source:**

- [The Hindu - Modi-led panel meets to select next NHRC chief](#)



## News in Shorts

### Active underwater hot spring in Southern Indian Ocean

- Indian oceanographers have captured the image of an **active hydrothermal vent** located 4,500 metres below the surface of the Indian Ocean.
- **Hydrothermal Vents:**
  - They are underwater springs found near tectonic plate boundaries.
  - They occur when cold water at the seabed (around 2°C) interacts with magma in tectonically active regions, heating up to 370°C.
  - The superheated water then escapes through chimneys and fissures as mineral-rich plumes.
  - The hot water from hydrothermal vents is rich in minerals, including sulfur, copper, zinc, gold, iron, and helium.

Source:

- [Indian Express - In a first image of Active underwater hot spring in Southern Indian Ocean](#)

### Padma Shri awardee Baiga tribal artist Jodhaiya Bai dies

- Jodhaiya Bai was a **Baiga tribal art artist**. She played an important role in bringing international recognition to **Baiga tribal art**.
- She was honoured with the **Padma Shri in 2023 & Nari Shakti Award in 2022** for her exceptional contribution to the field of arts.

#### About Baiga Tribe

- Baiga are an ethnic group in central India who are known for their unique culture, including their tattoos, their relationship with the forest and their festivals.
- They reside in **Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh**.
- They practice **slash-and-burn cultivation**, locally called "Bewar".
- Baiga was the **first community in India** who was granted **habitat rights** in 2016.

Source:

- [The Hindu - Baiga tribal artist Jodhaiya Bai dies](#)

### Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS)

- The Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh is the next location for cheetah reintroduction program after Kuno.
- **Location:** Mandsaur and Neemuch district in western Madhya Pradesh, bordering Rajasthan. It was notified as a WLS in **1974**
- **River:** The River Chambal flows through the sanctuary, dividing it into two parts.
- **IBA:** Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary and the reservoir is also a designated Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA).
- **Flora:** Khair, Salai, Tendu, Palash etc.
- **Fauna:** Chinkara, Nilgai, and Spotted Deer, **Leopard**, Striped Hyena, and Jackal etc.
  - It also has a good population of **crocodiles and turtles**.
- **Historical Places:** Chaturbhujnath temple, Bhadkaji rock paintings & Hinglajgarh fort

Source:

- [Indian Express - MP plans new home for Cheetah](#)

## Editorial Summary

### Section 6A of the Citizenship Act — why it fails Assam

#### Context

- The Supreme Court of India's ruling on October 17, 2024, upheld the constitutional validity of Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955, by a 4:1 majority.
- The judgment has raised significant concerns regarding constitutional violations and potential negative implications for Assam's cultural and demographic landscape.

#### Section 6A of the Citizenship Act

- **Section 6A** was inserted into the **Citizenship Act, 1955** via an amendment in **1985** following the signing of the **Assam Accord**.
- The provision establishes a **special framework** for granting Indian citizenship to migrants from **Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan)** who settled in **Assam** before a specified date.
  - **Before January 1, 1966:** Migrants who entered Assam before this date were automatically deemed **Indian citizens**.
  - **Between January 1, 1966, and March 25, 1971:** Migrants who entered Assam during this period were required to register and would be granted citizenship after a **10-year residency period**.
  - **After March 25, 1971:** Migrants entering after this date were considered **illegal immigrants** and were subject to **detection and deportation**.
- This was designed to address the influx of migrants and the resultant socio-cultural and political tensions in Assam.

#### Flaws and Gaps in Supreme Court Ruling

- **Inconsistent Reasoning Regarding Article 14 (Right to Equality)**
  - **Court's Justification:** The Court justified the singling out of **Assam** for a distinct citizenship framework based on **rational considerations**, arguing that the **impact of migration** on Assam was more severe than on other states like **West Bengal, Tripura, and Meghalaya**.
  - **Flaw:** The Court contradicted itself by acknowledging the disproportionate impact on Assam under **Article 14** but later dismissing the cultural concerns under **Article 29**.
    - This inconsistency indicates an **arbitrary application** of the equality principle.
- **Contradictory Interpretation of Article 29 (Cultural Rights)**
  - **Court's View:** The Court held that **Section 6A** does not infringe on **Article 29** (right to conserve cultural identity), reasoning that migrants' presence does not automatically hinder Assamese people from protecting their culture.
  - **Flaw:** The Court overlooked the **demographic and linguistic displacement** caused by migration.
    - The decline in the **Assamese-speaking population** (from **69.3% in 1951 to 48.38% in 2011**) and the rise in the **Bengali-speaking population** (from **21.2% in 1951 to 28.91% in 2011**) highlight the erosion of Assamese cultural identity.
    - The Court's abstract recognition of the right to "conserve" culture failed to address the **real-world challenges** of cultural preservation.
- **Overlooking Temporal Unreasonableness**
  - Laws that were reasonable when enacted can become unreasonable over time.
  - Section 6A, enacted in 1985, still allows for indefinite application of citizenship rules decades after the cut-off date (March 25, 1971).
  - **Flaw:**
    - The Court failed to acknowledge that the lack of a temporal limitation makes the law outdated and ineffective.

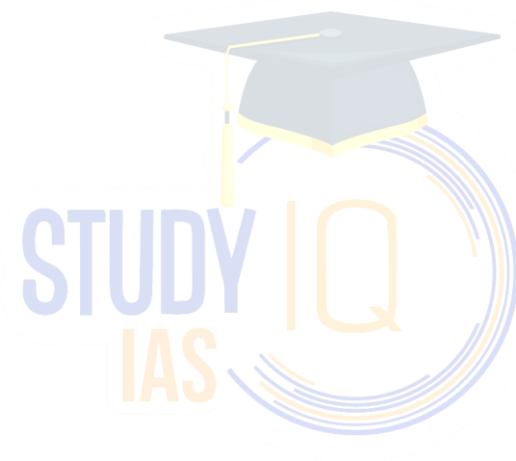


- 40 years after the Assam Accord, the provision no longer addresses the current migration challenges.
- **Flawed Mechanism for Identifying Migrants**
  - **State Burden:** The process under **Section 6A(3)** places the burden of identifying illegal migrants on the **state** rather than on the individuals themselves.
  - **Flaw:** The absence of a mechanism for **voluntary self-identification** results in delays and inefficiencies.
    - The **Foreigners' Tribunals** are overwhelmed, causing confusion and delaying the resolution of cases.

### Conclusion

The Supreme Court's ruling on Section 6A raises critical constitutional concerns regarding cultural preservation and demographic integrity in Assam. The majority opinion's reasoning appears insufficiently robust against established constitutional principles, particularly concerning Articles 14 and 29. As such, the ruling may have long-term negative implications for the Assamese identity and social fabric amid ongoing migration challenges

Source: [The Hindu: Section 6A of the Citizenship Act — why it fails Assam](#)



## Strengthening the roots of an agri-carbon market

### Context

The potential of carbon markets to transform Indian agriculture is significant, offering farmers opportunities to adopt sustainable practices while contributing to climate change mitigation. Carbon pricing, through compliance and voluntary markets, serves as a critical tool in this transformation.

### Introduction to Carbon Markets and Carbon Pricing

- **Carbon Markets:** Carbon markets have the potential to transform Indian agriculture by making sustainable farming practices financially rewarding while combating climate change.
- **Carbon Pricing:** A critical tool for climate change mitigation, carbon pricing operates through:
  - **Compliance Markets: Regulated by governments or international bodies** like the United Nations.
    - This operates under a **cap-and-trade system**.
    - Companies exceeding emission caps must either:
      - Purchase **carbon credits** from mitigation projects (e.g., agroforestry, sustainable agriculture).
      - Pay **carbon taxes** for extra emissions.
  - **Voluntary Markets: Unregulated** markets where organizations **trade carbon credits through mechanisms** like:
    - Clean Development Mechanism (CDM)
    - Verra
    - Gold Standard
    - **E.g.**, an airline company that wants to claim carbon neutrality can calculate how many carbon emissions they are unable to get rid of.
      - They can then purchase an equivalent amount of carbon offset credits by investing in a regenerative farming project in Brazil.

### Principles of Carbon Markets

- **Additionality:** Emission reductions must occur **only due to the adoption of carbon credits**.
  - Farmers using pre-existing sustainable practices are **not eligible** for credits.
- **Permanence:** Ensures the **long-term durability** of benefits (e.g., carbon stored in soil must not be lost through practices like conventional ploughing).

### Recent Developments in Carbon Markets

- **COP29 (November 2024):** A **centralized carbon market** under the United Nations received approval.
- **India's Initiatives:** Announced plans for **compliance and voluntary carbon markets**.
  - **NABARD** (National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development) has listed five agriculture carbon credit projects in collaboration with the Indian Council of Agricultural Research and state universities under Verra.

### Current State of Carbon Farming in India

- Over 50 agricultural carbon farming projects have been registered with Verra, targeting 1.6 million hectares of farmland in India.
- These projects aim to generate approximately 4.7 million carbon credits annually, equivalent to offsetting GHG emissions from 11 billion miles driven by an average gasoline-powered vehicle

### Challenges Identified

- A recent study analyzed seven carbon farming projects in Haryana and Madhya Pradesh, revealing significant socio-economic exclusions:
  - **Women represented only 4%** of participants.

- **Carbon farmers cultivated more land** than non-carbon farmers (51% more in Haryana and 32% more in Madhya Pradesh).
- **Land ownership among non-carbon farmers was skewed** towards non-marginalized castes (46% owned by general castes vs. 17% by SC/ST).

#### Issues with Implementation

- **Communication Gaps:** 45% of farmers reported no communication regarding project details.
- **Lack of Training:** Over 60% lacked training in new sustainable techniques.
- **Financial Incentives:** 28% stopped sustainable practices by the second year due to insufficient financial incentives.
- **Carbon Credit Payments:** Alarming, 99% had not received payments for carbon credits.
- **Project Management:** "Carbon Core" Projects (managed by startups solely focused on carbon credits) performed **better** than projects run by larger corporations.
  - However, they were **less inclusive** of smallholders and marginalized groups.

#### Recommendations for Addressing Challenges

- **Incentivize Inclusivity:** Offer **higher prices** for carbon credits that include **smallholders** and **marginalized communities**.
- **Improve Communication and Training:** Ensure **regular communication** and **training** for farmers.
- **Timely Payments:** Guarantee **timely payment** for carbon credits to maintain trust and participation.
- **Collaboration for Effective Implementation:** Partner with **national and international research institutions** to:
  - Identify **suitable regions**.
  - Avoid **yield penalties**.
  - Protect **food security**.

#### Conclusion

Building a thriving agricultural carbon market in India requires:

- **Policymakers, researchers, and private entities** working together.
- Ensuring **inclusivity, transparency, and timely rewards** for farmers.
- Addressing **implementation challenges** to foster trust and long-term participation.

Source: [The Hindu: Strengthening the roots of an agri-carbon market](#)

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## Detailed Coverage

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### India- Sri Lanka Relations

#### Context

Recently newly elected Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake (AKD) visited India.

#### Areas of Cooperation Between India and Sri Lanka

- **Economic and Infrastructure Development:**
  - Projects like the **Kankesanthurai Port** and the **Trincomalee Oil Tank Farm**.
  - Indian financing for an **undersea oil pipeline** and an **electricity transmission line** for Sri Lanka's energy security.
  - **Conversion of seven Line of Credit projects** worth \$20 million to grants.
- **Trade and Investment:** Sri Lanka is one of India's largest trading partners in SAARC.
  - India and Sri Lanka reached USD 5.5 billion in FY 2023-24.
  - Tourism is another important component with India being the leading tourist source market.
- **Energy Cooperation:** India to supply **LNG gas** to Sri Lanka to support energy needs.
  - Sri Lanka is dependent on India for **refined petroleum** supplies.
- **Defence and Security:** Sri Lanka's strategic role in India's **SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region)** policy.
  - India continues to be the largest provider of foreign training assistance to Sri Lankan Armed Forces.
  - Bilateral SLINEX (Naval Exercise) and MITRA SHAKTI (Army Exercise) held every year alternatively in India & Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka participates in MILAN, the multilateral naval exercise hosted by the Indian Navy.
- **Community and Social Support**
  - India supports the aspirations of **all communities in Sri Lanka**, including the Tamil minority.
  - India has provided multi-faceted assistance to Sri Lanka, close to USD 4 billion, during the economic crisis in 2022.
  - **Buddhism**, spread by Ashoka is one of the strong pillars connecting both Nations.
  - Cooperation in **education and technology exchanges** to boost social development.
- **Multilateral:** Sri Lanka is a member of regional groupings like BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) and SAARC in which India plays a leading role.

### Need to Enhance Ties With Sri Lanka

Enhanced cooperation with Sri Lanka is crucial given the challenges India faces in its immediate neighborhood.

- **Strained Relations with Bangladesh:** Ties with **Bangladesh** are currently strained, limiting strategic options for regional collaboration.
- **Maldives' Economic Vulnerability:** **Maldives**, facing economic distress, accepted a short-term liquidity inflow of an RBI swap after China cooled its request for aid.
- **Nepal's Alignment with China:** **Nepal's PM K P Sharma Oli** has signed a framework agreement with **China** to advance Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) infrastructure projects.
- **Instability in Afghanistan:** Under **Taliban rule**, Afghanistan is grappling with economic hardship, making it a potential hub for **narcotics trade** and **illegal migration**.
- **Myanmar's Regional Risks:** Myanmar's instability also increases risks of **illegal migration** and cross-border issues for the region.
- **Stalemate with Pakistan:** India's relations with **Pakistan** remain largely frozen, with little progress towards normalization.

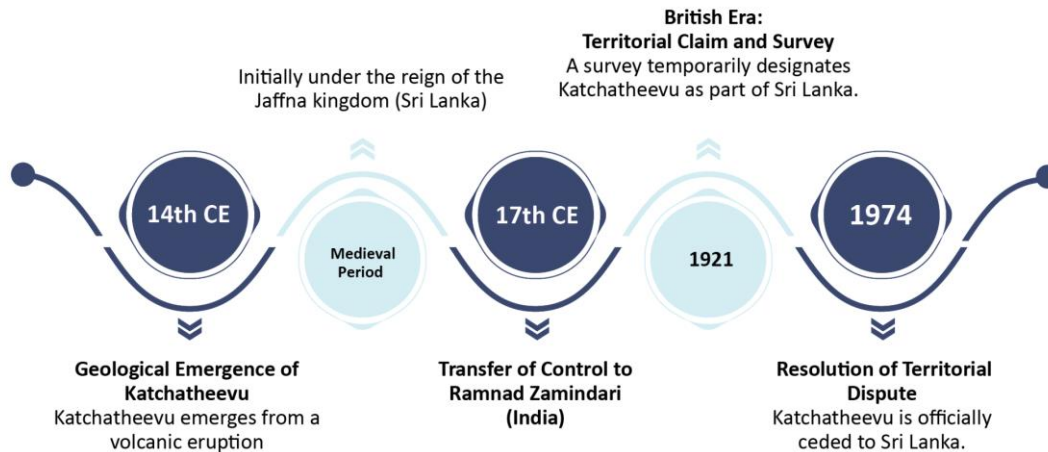
### Concerns

- **China's Influence:** China's involvement in developing strategic assets like the **Hambantota Port** raises security concerns for India.
- **Tamil Minority Issues:** The need to address the aspirations of **Sri Lanka's Tamil minority**, especially concerning the implementation of the **13th Amendment** for devolution of power.
- **Fishermen Dispute:** Frequent disputes over **Tamil Nadu fishermen** straying into Sri Lankan waters (such as near Katchatheevu Island), leading to arrests and tensions.
- **Economic Vulnerabilities:** Sri Lanka's heavy reliance on **external debt** and need for continued **IMF support** pose challenges for economic stability.

### Katchatheevu Island



### Historical Context



- Katchatheevu is an **uninhabited off-shore island** in the **Palk Strait**.
- It was formed due to **volcanic eruptions** in the 14th century.
- The 285-acre land was **jointly administered** by India and Sri Lanka during **British rule**.
- It has been **used by fishermen** from both countries for centuries as a resting point during **fishing expeditions in the Palk Strait**.
- The island lacks fresh water sources, making it unsuitable for permanent habitation.

### The Indo-Sri Lankan Maritime Agreement of 1974

- Aimed to definitively resolve the maritime boundary between India and Sri Lanka.
- The Indian Government ceded Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka, deeming it of minimal strategic value, to strengthen ties with Sri Lanka.
- The **agreement allowed Indian fishermen** access to Katchatheevu for **rest, drying nets, and shrine visits** without a visa, though it left some **issues regarding fishing rights** unresolved.
- **Subsequent developments:**
  - **1976:** 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**, creating ambiguity over fishing rights near Katchatheevu.
  - **Impact of Sri Lankan Civil War (1983-2009):** The conflict put border disputes on hold, with Indian fishermen often encroaching into Sri Lankan waters, leading to tensions over fishing practices and resources.
  - The Sri Lankan navy began strictly enforcing maritime boundaries, leading to the arrest and, in some cases, allegations of mistreatment of Indian fishermen.

### Way Forward

- **Strategic Balance with China:** Continued **Indian investments** and infrastructure support to counterbalance China's influence.
  - Ensuring **Sri Lanka's maritime policies** are aligned with India's security interests.
- **Resolving Tamil Minority Issues:** Supporting the implementation of **Sri Lanka's 13th Amendment**.
  - Engaging diplomatically to ensure the rights of the **Tamil minority** are respected.
- **Coordinated Fishing Agreements:** Establish a **coordinated fishing model** to reduce tensions over fishing disputes.

- **Governance and Anti-Corruption Initiatives:** India can assist in **governance reforms, digitization, and modernization of agriculture** in Sri Lanka.
- **Strengthening Economic Ties:** Expediting an **upgraded Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** by 2025 and a comprehensive trade deal by 2026.
  - Piloting a regional Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) 2 scheme in Sri Lanka to boost mutual business interests.
  - Broaden business collaboration to include more sectors (**food processing, textiles and garments, auto parts, and IT-related services**) and regions (**all four southern Indian states**).
- **Enhanced Connectivity:** Improve **physical connectivity** for trade and tourism.
- **Economic Stability Initiatives:** Providing aid and **trade-related assistance** to bolster economic recovery.

Source: [The Indian Express: From Aid to Trade](#)

