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The Way Forward on Katchatheevu, Palk Strait Disputes

Context

- India's foreign policy has long been shaped by **principles of peaceful coexistence** and regional cooperation.
- From the **Panchsheel framework to the Non-Aligned Movement** and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), India has consistently emphasised interdependence and stability in South Asia.
- **Bilateral relations with Sri Lanka** continue to be **tested by unresolved concerns**, particularly the fisheries crisis in the Palk Strait and the **sovereignty of Katchatheevu island**.
- Addressing these challenges demands **a careful balance of livelihoods, ecological sustainability, and legal commitments**.

The Fisheries Dispute: Livelihoods and Conservation at Odds

• The Issue at Hand

- **Fishing communities** in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka's Northern Province **have shared the Palk Strait for centuries**.
- However, **today's disputes stem largely from Indian mechanised bottom trawling** in Sri Lankan waters.
- **Such practices**, though profitable for trawler operators, are **ecologically destructive, damaging coral beds and depleting fish stocks**.
- Both the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the FAO's Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries condemn destructive methods such as bottom trawling.

• Sri Lanka's Concern

- **Sri Lanka banned bottom trawling in 2017**, but hundreds of Indian trawlers continue to cross the maritime boundary.
- This not only harms Sri Lanka's marine ecology but also **jeopardises the livelihoods of Tamil Nadu's small-scale artisanal fishers**.
- Ironically, these traditional fishers, who follow sustainable methods, also suffer from resource depletion caused by trawler operations, **compelling them to enter contested waters**.

- Thus, **the issue is not merely interstate; it reflects a deeper livelihood conflict** within Tamil fishing communities themselves.

The Katchatheevu Question: Myths and Realities

- Public debate in India often **portrays Katchatheevu, a small barren islet in the Palk Strait**, as the crux of the fisheries conflict.
- In reality, the **1974 India-Sri Lanka Maritime Boundary Treaty**, which placed the islet within Sri Lankan territory, settled the issue.
- Under international law, **boundary treaties are sacrosanct (pacta sunt servanda)** and cannot be unilaterally repudiated.
- Contrary to popular belief, the island was not gifted by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.
- **Historical records demonstrated Sri Lanka's stronger claim**, with evidence of administrative control **dating back to the Portuguese and Dutch periods, and earlier to the Tamil kings of Jaffna.**
- International precedents, such as the **ICJ's 1953 ruling in the Minquiers and Ecrehos case (France vs United Kingdom)**, reinforce that sovereignty rests on effective jurisdiction rather than rhetoric.
- India's concession was therefore consistent with **legal precedent and international norms.**
- It is important to distinguish between **sovereignty over Katchatheevu and fishing rights.**
- While the former is legally settled, the latter remains a matter of negotiation.
- The **Palk Strait has historically been recognised as historic waters** where sovereign rights are stronger than in normal territorial seas.
- **Joint management under UNCLOS provisions**, particularly Article 123 on semi-enclosed seas, **is both necessary and legally mandated.**

Models for Cooperation

- The **Baltic Sea Fisheries Convention** demonstrates how neighbouring states can share quotas to conserve marine resources.
- India and Sri Lanka could adopt **similar frameworks by:**
- **Establishing equitable quotas** for fishing days and catch.
- **Creating a joint marine research** station on Katchatheevu to monitor ecological health.
- **Encouraging deep-sea fishing in India's Exclusive Economic Zone** to reduce pressure on near-shore waters.
- **These measures would simultaneously protect livelihoods, conserve resources,** and strengthen bilateral trust.

The Way Forward

- **Toward a Good Neighbourhood Policy**
 - **India's regional leadership rests not only on geography** but also on shared cultural and civilisational bonds.

- With Sri Lanka, these ties are particularly deep.
- To preserve them, **disputes must be insulated from populist rhetoric** and addressed through quiet diplomacy, legal recognition, and livelihood security.
- **Solutions require multiple layers:** government-to-government negotiations to maintain treaty obligations, state- and provincial-level engagement to address local concerns, and people-to-people dialogue to counter misinformation.

• Community Sensitisation and Mutual Empathy

- Resolving the fisheries dispute also requires social understanding.
- **Sri Lankan Tamil families in the Northern Province**, many of whom suffered economic loss during the decades-long civil war, **should not be portrayed as adversaries.**
- Rather, they are fellow victims of historical hardship. **Sri Lankan Tamil politicians and media can play an important role** in sensitising Tamil Nadu about these realities.
- **This approach would revive the bonds of fraternity** that once enabled Tamil Nadu to receive Sri Lankan Tamil refugees with compassion.

Conclusion

- The **fisheries crisis and the Katchatheevu issue call for pragmatic solutions** rooted in law, sustainability, and compassion.
- **By distinguishing between legitimate subsistence needs** and unsustainable practices, developing community empathy, and embracing cooperative frameworks, **both nations can turn points of contention into opportunities for deeper partnership.**
- In doing so, **India reaffirms its commitment to a Neighbourhood First Policy** that balances regional leadership with shared prosperity.

The Way Forward on Katchatheevu, Palk Strait Disputes FAQs

Q1. What is the main cause of the fisheries dispute between India and Sri Lanka?

Ans. The main cause is Indian mechanised bottom trawling in Sri Lankan waters, which depletes marine resources and harms both Sri Lankan and Tamil Nadu artisanal fishers.

Q2. Why is bottom trawling considered problematic?

Ans. Bottom trawling is destructive because it damages coral reefs, destroys shrimp habitats, and depletes fish stocks, threatening long-term marine sustainability.

Q3. Is Katchatheevu the root of the fisheries conflict?

Ans. No, Katchatheevu is not the root cause; it is a legally settled issue under the 1974 India-Sri Lanka Maritime Boundary Treaty, while fishing rights are a separate matter.

Q4. How can India and Sri Lanka resolve the fisheries crisis sustainably?

Ans. They can resolve it by regulating fishing access, sharing quotas, setting seasonal limits, and encouraging deep-sea fishing in India's Exclusive Economic Zone.

Q5. Why is community sensitisation important in this dispute?

Ans. Community sensitisation is important because it fosters empathy between Tamil fishers on both sides, highlighting their shared struggles instead of portraying them as adversaries.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

A Joint and New Journey Along the SCO Pathway

Context:

- At the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit in Tianjin, Prime Minister Narendra Modi joined President Xi Jinping and leaders from 23 countries and 10 international organisations.
- Marking the largest SCO gathering since its inception 24 years ago, the summit highlighted solidarity, friendship, and cooperation, aiming to advance the organisation into a new phase of high-quality development.
- This article highlights the outcomes of the Tianjin SCO Summit, the 75th anniversary of China-India diplomatic ties, and the shared vision of both nations in shaping global governance and regional cooperation.

Tianjin SCO Summit Yields Key Outcomes

- The **SCO Tianjin Summit** produced significant results, including the **creation of four security centres** and the **decision to establish an SCO Development Bank**.
- Leaders endorsed a new decade-long development strategy and pledged support for multilateral trading and global peace.
- President Xi announced major cooperation platforms in energy, green industry, and the digital economy, alongside centres for innovation, higher education, and vocational training.
- Highlighting his **Global Governance Initiative**, Xi called for equality, rule of law, and people-centered multilateralism.
- Since joining in 2017, India has played a vital role in SCO, with China acknowledging Prime Minister Modi's support and seeking deeper collaboration in security, finance, and sustainable development.

75 Years of China-India Diplomatic Ties

- As India and China mark the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping reaffirmed their commitment to partnership, emphasizing that the two nations are partners, not rivals.
- Both leaders agreed that cooperation outweighs differences.
- Xi urged India and China to be good-neighbourly partners, symbolised as the “**dragon and elephant dancing together**.”
- Modi echoed this, calling for a long-term perspective in developing ties.

Pathways for Strengthening Relations

- **Consolidating Strategic Trust** - Both countries must learn from the past, build mutual respect and trust, and gradually resume dialogue mechanisms between governments to ensure peaceful coexistence and common development.
- **Expanding Exchanges and Cooperation** - Development should remain the central focus.
 - China expressed readiness to work with India in areas like technology, education, culture, tourism, and poverty alleviation, while also enhancing people-to-people exchanges across political, academic, media, and youth platforms.
- **Enhancing Good-Neighbourliness** - The two sides should uphold the **Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence**, respect each other's core concerns, and not let the unresolved boundary issue define bilateral relations. Instead, cooperation should ensure stability and mutual growth.
- The diamond jubilee of ties marks a renewed effort to build trust, deepen cooperation, and strengthen friendship between India and China, laying the foundation for more stable and constructive relations.

China and India's Shared Global Role

- As leading members of the Global South, India and China share interests in development, peace, and global governance.
- With both nations set to hold successive BRICS presidencies, China expressed readiness to work with India to strengthen cooperation, implement the Global Governance Initiative, oppose hegemony, uphold fairness and justice, and build a shared future for humanity.

Conclusion

- India and China, through the SCO platform and their bilateral ties, aim to strengthen cooperation, uphold fairness, and jointly build a stable and inclusive global order.

A Joint and New Journey Along the SCO Pathway FAQs

Q1. What was the significance of the Tianjin SCO Summit?

Ans. The Tianjin SCO Summit was the largest since inception, producing key outcomes such as new security centres, a development bank, and enhanced cooperation initiatives.

Q2. What major initiatives did President Xi announce at the SCO Summit?

Ans. Xi proposed platforms for cooperation in energy, green industry, and digital economy, alongside centres for innovation, higher education, and vocational training.

Q3. How did India and China mark their 75th diplomatic anniversary?

Ans. Modi and Xi reaffirmed that India and China are partners, not rivals, stressing long-term cooperation, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence for regional stability.

Q4. What are the key pathways for strengthening China-India relations?

Ans. Both sides aim to consolidate strategic trust, expand development-based cooperation, enhance people-to-people exchanges, and uphold the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.

Q5. What global role do India and China envision together?

Ans. As Global South leaders and successive BRICS presidents, they pledge to support global governance reforms, oppose hegemony, and promote fairness, justice, and sustainable growth.

Source: TH

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