

Palk Bay Conflict

January 26, 2021

In news : Recently, four fishermen from Tamil Nadu died in yet another instance of the unresolved fisheries conflict in the Palk Bay

A brief note on the issue

- Four fishermen- one of them a Sri Lankan Tamil refugee living in India have died in fisheries conflict
- As per fishermen from Tamil Nadu say the four were killed in an attack by the Sri Lankan Navy, the latter maintains that they died when their trawler collided with a naval vessel while trying to avoid being apprehended
- **India's response:** India has lodged a strong protest with the Sri Lankan authorities, who have set up a committee to find a permanent solution to the incursions by Indian fishermen

Joint Working Group

- It was less than a month ago that the two countries resumed discussions through their Joint Working Group on fisheries after a three-year gap.
- India sought the early release of fishermen arrested in Sri Lankan waters, as well as the boats in Sri Lankan custody.
- Sri Lanka underscored the need to curb the illegal fishing, which adversely affects the livelihood of its war-affected fishermen.
- When the two sides decided to create a joint working group some years ago, they had agreed that there would be no violence or loss of life in the handling of the fishermen and that a hotline would be established between the respective Coast Guards.
- It is unfortunate that the hotline is yet to be

operationalised, and deaths continue to occur.

India's maritime issue with Sri Lanka:

Though India has successfully demarcated its maritime boundary with Sri Lanka through 1974 and 1976 agreements, some issues are still there regarding the fishermen and Kachchatheevu island.

Kachchatheevu issue:

- As per 1974 Agreement, Kachchatheevu island was given to Sri Lanka and special provisions like pilgrimage rights were included but fishing was not explicitly mentioned.
- Indian fishermen have claimed their traditional fishing rights in the region which have been denied by the Sri Lankan authorities.
- In 2014, Tamil Nadu Government pleaded in SC to cancel the ceding of the island to Sri Lanka, Indian government clarified that, island was a disputed territory and therefore was given during the boundary settlement process. (In Berubari Union case it has been decided that settling territorial disputes does not require Parliamentary approval.)

Fisherman's issue:

- The Sri Lankan Navy started exercising greater control and vigilance over Palk Strait since Tamil Elam war.
- During the process many times they had fired on Indian fishermen who had strayed into Sri Lankan waters which had infuriated dispute.
- Along with this the ease of the restriction on Sri Lankan fisherman, use of high end technology by Indian fishermen has complicated the issue.

About Palk bay

Palk Bay is a semi-enclosed shallow water body with a water depth maximum of 13m. It is located between the southeast

coast of India and Sri Lanka

