

Mains Master

Congress 'callously' gave away Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka: PM

Context :

Prime Minister Narendra Modi criticized the Congress for ceding Katchatheevu island to Sri Lanka in 1974, citing an RTI query revealing conflicting claims over the island's ownership. Modi accused the Congress of weakening India's unity and integrity, while the BJP in Tamil Nadu aims to retrieve the island to address fishermen's issues.

Background:

- Kutchatheevu is a small, uninhabited island located in the Palk Strait between India and Sri Lanka.
- Both countries have historical claims to the island. India claims control through the Ramnad kingdom's rule, while Sri Lanka points to the Jaffna kingdom's control and British/Dutch maps.

Bone of Contention:

- The maritime boundary between India and Sri Lanka, particularly the ownership and fishing rights around Kutchatheevu Island.

1974 Agreement:

- The Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of 1974 established a maritime boundary between the two countries.
- The agreement ceded control of Kutchatheevu to Sri Lanka by drawing the boundary a mile off the western coast of the island.
- This decision by India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi has been a source of contention, especially for Tamil Nadu fishermen who lost access to traditional fishing grounds.
- The agreement did not explicitly address fishing rights around the island, leading to ambiguity and frequent arrests of Indian fishermen by Sri Lanka for allegedly entering their waters.

Present Contention:

- Fishing Rights:** Ambiguity in the agreement has led to frequent arrests and harassment of Indian fishermen by Sri Lankan authorities.
- Tamil Nadu Concerns:** Fishermen in Tamil Nadu have lost access to productive fishing grounds and their livelihoods are impacted. Additionally, many Tamils feel the island rightfully belongs to India.
- Environmental Issues:** Destructive fishing practices by Sri Lankan boats threaten the long-term sustainability of fisheries in the Palk Strait.

Inter-Governmental Initiatives:

- Joint Committee (2007):** Established to explore solutions, but progress has been limited.
- Ongoing Talks:** Diplomatic negotiations continue, focusing on preventing fisherman arrests and finding long-term solutions.
- Agreements (2008 & 2010):** Aimed to reduce tensions by establishing communication channels between Coast Guards and allowing notifications for accidental boundary crossings. However, these haven't entirely prevented arrests.

Way Forward:

- Joint Management:** A power-sharing arrangement for the island and its resources.
- Fishing Zone Agreements:** Defining specific fishing zones for both sides to prevent arrests and promote sustainability.
- Alternative Livelihoods:** Exploring ways to support fishermen impacted by the dispute through alternative income sources.
- Clear Fishing Rights:** Negotiating a clear agreement on fishing rights for Indian fishermen in the disputed waters.
- Addressing Domestic Concerns:** Finding a solution that considers the political sensitivities in both Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka.

Compounding crises

Context

- Climate change is increasing the frequency and severity of extreme weather events, with direct implications for vulnerable regions like South India.
- El Niño events and rising global temperatures exacerbate water scarcity risks.

Background

- South India is facing a looming water deficit crisis, with reservoirs far below average capacity.
- The previous major drought occurred in 2017, indicating a lack of preparedness despite recurring crises.

Water Crisis

- Key factors contributing to the water crisis include:**
 - Unreliable monsoons and severe El Niño impacts
 - Record-breaking temperatures further straining resources
 - Unsustainable urban growth, over-extraction of groundwater
 - Inefficient water reuse and resource management
 - Inadequate community participation

Compounding Crises

- Climate change creates cascading effects, where a water crisis can worsen the impact of other challenges:
 - Increased risk of concurrent disasters (drought + disease outbreak)
 - Exacerbated socioeconomic disparities for marginalized populations

Implications

- India and other lower-income nations bear the brunt of climate-related crises.
- Water scarcity not only poses direct risks but acts as a multiplier, worsening multiple other problems.
- The recurring nature of this crisis highlights systemic failures in policy and preparedness.

Way Forward

- Proactive response mechanisms are urgently needed, going beyond climate change rhetoric:**
 - Prioritize water resource management and conservation
 - Invest in sustainable urban planning and resilient infrastructure
 - Increase community-based water governance and resource protection
 - Address underlying socio-economic inequalities that exacerbate vulnerability

Kejriwal's arrest: Understanding Prevention of Money Laundering Act

Context

- Arvind Kejriwal, Chief Minister of Delhi, faces arrest in a money laundering case connected to the Delhi Excise Policy.
- The Enforcement Directorate (ED) alleges a scam involving kickbacks from alcohol businesses, with proceeds used to influence elections. Kejriwal is accused as the "kingpin" in this alleged scheme.

Background

- The Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) is India's primary legal tool against financial crimes.
 - It aims to target illegal proceeds ("proceeds of crime"), allowing for their seizure and prosecution of those involved.
- Key Points**
- **Proceeds of Crime:** Central to this case are the alleged kickbacks from alcohol businesses, considered proceeds of crime under PMLA.
 - **Vicarious Liability:** The ED argues that both Kejriwal (as Chief Minister and AAP convener) and AAP itself can be held responsible for money laundering, even if not directly involved in all aspects of the scheme.
 - **Section 70:** This PMLA provision allows for the prosecution of companies and their responsible individuals. This potentially places political parties under the law's scrutiny.
 - **Predicate Offenses:** PMLA investigations must be linked to a "scheduled offense." Here, the predicate offense falls under the Prevention of Corruption Act.
 - **Standalone Offense:** Importantly, money laundering can be charged independently of the predicate offense, focusing purely on concealing or using the proceeds.
- Implications for Kejriwal and AAP**
- The ED seeks to establish AAP's involvement in using the illegal funds, making the party and its leaders liable.
 - If successful, AAP could become the first political party prosecuted under the PMLA, potentially leading to asset seizure or confiscation.
- Critical Outlook**
- **Approver Testimony:** The case partially relies on the testimony of individuals who turned approvers. Such testimony requires careful scrutiny and independent corroboration.
 - **Broad PMLA Powers:** The PMLA grants substantial investigative and enforcement powers to authorities. Ensuring these powers aren't misused is crucial for its fair implementation.
- What is the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA)?**
- The PMLA is a central piece of legislation in India enacted in 2002.
 - Its primary aim is to combat the crime of money laundering.
 - Money laundering is the process of disguising illegally obtained money (proceeds of crime) to make it appear as if it came from legitimate sources.
- Key Objectives of the PMLA:**
- 1 Preventing Money Laundering:** The act seeks to prevent criminals from masking their ill-gotten gains and channeling them into seemingly legitimate activities.
 - 2 Confiscation of Illicit Property:** The PMLA empowers authorities to confiscate property linked to money laundering offenses.
 - 3 Punishing Offenders:** The law lays out penalties and punishments for those found guilty of money laundering.
 - 4 International Cooperation:** The PMLA aligns with international standards for fighting money laundering, allowing collaboration with other countries.
- Key Provisions of the PMLA:**
- **Obligations for Financial Institutions: Banks, financial institutions, and intermediaries have to:**
 - Verify client identities
 - Maintain detailed records of transactions
 - Report suspicious activities to the Financial Intelligence Unit – India (FIU-IND)
 - **Powers of the Enforcement Directorate (ED): The ED has broad investigative powers under the PMLA, including:**
 - Conducting searches and seizures
 - Summoning individuals for questioning
 - Freezing and attaching suspected assets
 - Predicate Offenses: The PMLA defines a list of "scheduled offenses" which serve as the basis for money laundering investigations. These include:
 - Corruption
 - Drug trafficking
 - Terrorism
 - Tax evasion
 - **Punishments: The PMLA sets out stringent punishments for money laundering, including:**

- Imprisonment (up to 7 or even 10 years in certain cases)
- Heavy fines

Important Points to Note:

- **Burden of Proof:** Unlike many criminal cases, under the PMLA the burden of proof partially rests on the accused to demonstrate that the suspect property or assets were not obtained through illegal means.
- **Vicarious Liability:** The PMLA can hold companies and organizations liable for the actions of their employees or representatives in relation to money laundering.

Prelims Booster

World's most powerful laser points to uncharted arenas

Revolutionary Laser Technology:

Engineer Antonia Toma activates the world's most powerful laser at the ELI project in Romania, operated by Thales, utilizing Nobel prize-winning laser inventions by Gerard Mourou and Donna Strickland for advanced precision instruments.

Applications and Advancements:

The powerful laser offers revolutionary advances in various sectors, from healthcare to space exploration, with potential applications in treating nuclear waste, reducing radioactivity, and cleaning up space debris, showcasing the phenomenal powers and possibilities of laser technology.

Gerard Mourou's Vision:

Mr. Mourou, a Nobel laureate, emphasizes the transformative potential of lasers, describing the amplification process from a small luminous seed to phenomenal powers, marking the 21st century as the era of laser technology akin to the electron's significance in the last century.

A record 60 traditional products from across India granted GI tag

Record Number of GI Tags:

Over 60 traditional products from various regions in India, including Banaras Thandai, have been granted the Geographical Indication (GI) tag, marking the largest number of products to receive this recognition simultaneously.

Assam's Traditional Crafts:

Assam secures GI tags for six traditional crafts, including Asharikandi terracotta craft, Pani Meteka craft, and iconic items like Jaapi (bamboo headgear), Mishing handloom products, and Bihu dhol, showcasing the rich cultural heritage of the state.

Assam's Unique Products:

Thirteen products from Assam, such as Bodo Dokhona, Bodo Eri silk, Bodo Jwmgra, and Bodo Gamsa, receive the GI tag, highlighting the significance of these traditional items deeply rooted in history and supporting local livelihoods.

Banaras Thandai and More:

The famous Banaras Thandai, a traditional drink with a blend of milk, nuts, seeds, and spices, receives the GI tag, along with other products like Banaras Tabla, Banaras Shehnai, Banaras Lal Bharwamirch, and Banaras Lal Peda, reflecting the cultural richness of the region.

Diverse Regional Recognition:

Regions like Tripura, Meghalaya, and others also secure GI tags for their traditional products, such as Pachra-Rignai dress, Matabari Peda sweet, Meghalaya Garo Textile weaving, Meghalaya Lymnai Pottery, and Meghalaya Chubitchi, showcasing the unique socio-cultural and artistic heritage of these areas.

- In India, Geographical Indications (GI) tags are governed by the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999. This Act came into effect in September 2003.
- The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act is compliant with the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) of the World Trade Organization (WTO). This ensures international recognition and protection for Indian GI-tagged products.