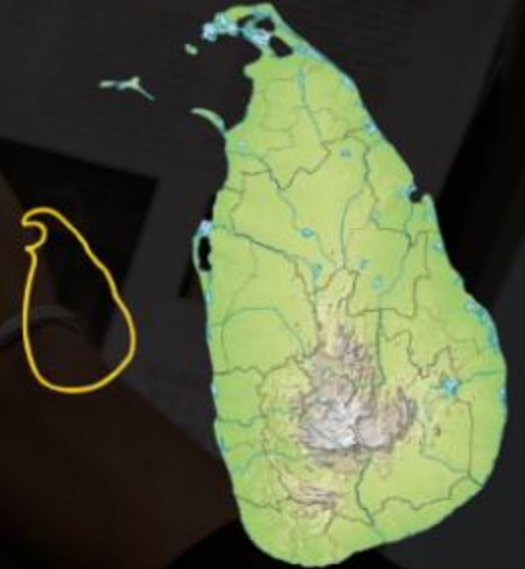




**BAJIRAO IAS ACADEMY**

# THE HINDU ANALYSIS

**11 SEPTEMBER 2025**



**KATCHATEEVU ISLAND  
DISPUTE**





# Katchatheevu, Palk Strait Dispute

## 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.

## The way forward on Katchatheevu, Palk Strait disputes

India has historically shaped regional and global diplomacy through the Panchsheel principles, the Non-Aligned Movement, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, and, most recently, with its "Neighbourhood First Policy". This stance has generally promoted peace and interdependence in South Asia. However, its unresolved issues with Sri Lanka, as the fisheries crisis in the Palk Straits and the sovereignty of Katchatheevu island, pose challenges.

During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Colombo in April 2025, both governments revisited these long-standing concerns. Mr. Modi emphasised a "humane approach" to the fisheries issue – one that balances livelihoods with conservation. This vision can succeed only if India and Sri Lanka address ecological imperatives and historic grievances in a spirit of cooperation.

### Livelihood and conservation at odds

Fishing communities along the Tamil Nadu coast and the Northern Province of Sri Lanka have, for centuries, shared the Palk Straits. But disputes today are exacerbated by Indian vessels carrying out mechanised bottom trawling in Sri Lankan waters.

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) lays stress not only on equitable use of marine resources but also their conservation. Similarly, the FAO's Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries 1995 deems destructive practices such as bottom trawling to be unacceptable.

Sri Lanka banned bottom trawling in 2017, but hundreds of Indian trawlers still continue the practice, damaging coral beds, shrimp habitats, and depleting fish stocks. Ironically, Tamil Nadu's smaller artisanal fishers, who use traditional sustainable methods, also suffer: their near-shore resources have been depleted by the trawler industry, forcing them into contested waters. Thus, this is not just a territorial clash but also a livelihood conflict within the Tamil communities themselves – between business trawler operators pursuing profit and traditional fishers who are dependent on the sea for subsistence.

A sustainable resolution calls for making a distinction between the needs of artisanal fishers and trawler operators. Trawler operators cannot claim empathy as their commercial profits are at the expense of marine sustainability and community welfare. Small boat artisanal fishers have fished in these waters "from time immemorial" and their plight deserves humane accommodation.

This can be worked out through dialogue between Indian and Sri Lankan fisher organisations. With the consent of the Sri Lankan fishers, they can work out quotas or regulated



**Nirmala Chandrasekaran**  
is Attorney-at-Law,  
Supreme Court  
of Sri Lanka

access and set out limited fishing rights on specific days or seasons for Tamil Nadu's small fishers, until India's stocks recover.

There should be community sensitisation. Sri Lankan Tamil Members of Parliament and the Tamil media can play a role by highlighting in Tamil Nadu the hardships that the Northern fishermen suffered during Sri Lanka's long civil war. Many of these families lost decades of income when the military restricted sea access during the conflict. They should not be portrayed as aggressors but as fellow victims of economic loss. Such steps would foster goodwill. It is worth remembering that during the Sri Lankan conflict, Tamil refugees were received in Tamil Nadu with compassion, housed in camps, and given assistance. Preserving these bonds of fraternity is essential.

### Clearing the misconceptions

Public debate often portrays Katchatheevu, the tiny uninhabited islet in the Palk Straits, as the root of the fisheries dispute. This is misleading. Katchatheevu is less than half a square mile in area, and is barren except for the church of St. Anthony, which fishermen from Tamil Nadu continue to visit for the annual festival under the 1974 India-Sri Lanka Maritime Boundary Treaty. The 1974 boundary settlement placed the islet in Sri Lankan waters. The Treaty is legally binding. Under international law, boundary treaties are sacrosanct (*pacta sunt servanda*). They cannot be unilaterally repudiated without undermining the global order – just as China's contestation of its settled frontiers with India generates instability.

Myths such as "Indira Gandhi gifted the island to Srimavo Bandaranaike" need clarification. In reality, India weighed historic evidence of sovereignty before deciding. Records showed Sri Lankan administrative control dating back to Portuguese and Dutch rule, and, earlier, to the Tamil kings of the kingdom of Jaffna.

International precedents exist in the following cases. In the *Minquiers and Ecrehos* case (*France vs United Kingdom*), the International Court of Justice (1953), the ICJ awarded sovereignty to the U.K., despite France's historical claim through the Duchy of Normandy, because it had exercised administrative jurisdiction. Similarly, India conceded that Sri Lanka had the stronger claim. Another example is the *Rann of Kutch* Arbitration (1968) between India and Pakistan.

Thus, retrieving Katchatheevu is not a question of justice but of political rhetoric. It remains a settled issue under international law. Importantly, fishing rights are a distinct matter – not linked to sovereignty over the islet.

The Palk Straits and adjacent waters were recognised as "historic waters" under Indian and Sri Lankan law – areas where sovereign rights are even stronger than in normal territorial seas. As

such, there is no "right of innocent passage" or third-state fishing rights without explicit consent. Judicial recognition of historic rights dates back to the Madras High Court case of *Annalamuru Pillai vs Mathapuzhayal And Ors.* (1904), which upheld claims based on traditional pearl and conch fisheries. Therefore, India's acceptance in 1974 of the maritime boundary was not whimsical but legally consistent with historic precedent.

The UNCLOS (Article 123) encourages cooperation in semi-enclosed seas – such as the Palk Bay and Gulf of Mannar. Here, joint resource management is not just ideal but mandatory.

Models exist as in the Baltic Sea Fisheries Convention where Latvia, Poland and the European Union share quotas to conserve resources.

India and Sri Lanka could implement similar frameworks such as equitable quotas for fishing days and catch, a joint research station on Katchatheevu for marine biologists to monitor resources and suggest sustainable practices, and promotion of deep-sea fishing in India's 200-nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), reducing pressure on near-shore waters and lessening illegal crossings.

### Toward good neighbourhood policy

India's regional leadership is shaped not just by geography but also by cultural and civilisational ties. With Sri Lanka, those ties are especially deep. To protect them, disputes must be addressed without populist rhetoric but through quiet cooperation, legal recognition and shared livelihood security. The way forward involves multiple levels such as

government-to-government talks (retaining trust and treaty obligations) and State/Provincial engagement (involving Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka's Northern Provincial Council and community dialogue, encouraging people-people empathy that overcomes media distortions).

If handled with prudence, the Katchatheevu and Palk Straits issues can become symbols of cooperation rather than conflict.

India and Sri Lanka share not only maritime boundaries but also centuries of cultural, religious, and kinship ties. The fisheries issue requires fairness to both communities, prioritising artisanal livelihoods and ecological sustainability. The Katchatheevu issue, meanwhile, is legally settled – it should no longer cloud the real problem of managing resources. By adopting a collaborative fisheries regime, investing in deep-sea alternatives, and respecting historical legal agreements, the fishers of Tamil Nadu and the Northern province of Sri Lanka could move from confrontation to cooperation. In the long arc of diplomacy, smaller disputes must not overshadow the larger vision: peace, prosperity and mutual respect in South Asia.

## 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.

### 'BALANCING CLAIM VS BILATERAL TIES'

➤ In 1961, Pandit Nehru said he **would not hesitate in giving up claims** to Katchatheevu

➤ This despite attorney gen M C Setalvad opining in 1960 that despite contradicting claims, **India's case was stronger** than Lanka's

➤ Rights over island, including fishery and other resources, **enjoyed 'continuously and uninterrupted' from 1875 to 1948 by Raja of Ramnad**

➤ Following **opn pressure in 1968**, Indira govt said India's claim had to be balanced with need for good bilateral ties



➤ In 1974, govt's **decision to relinquish India's claim** conveyed to CM Karunanidhi

➤ Foreign secy said Sri Lanka had records to push its claim while State of Madras **failed to show Raja of Ramnad had original title**

## 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.
- ❑ 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.



# Shanghai Cooperation Organization

## 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.

## *A joint and new journey along the SCO pathway*

Last week, I was privileged to welcome Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Tianjin, China, for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit, and attend the meeting between China's President Xi Jinping and Mr. Modi. This is a summit of solidarity and friendship. After 24 years of development, the SCO has grown into the world's largest regional organisation. The SCO Tianjin Summit has been the largest since the organisation's establishment. Leaders or the representatives of 23 countries, Mr. Modi included, and 10 heads of international organisations gathered to renew friendship, explore cooperation, seek common development, and advance the SCO into a new stage of high-quality development.

### **A high-yielding summit**

There were fruitful outcomes. The Tianjin Declaration announced the establishment of "four security centres", including the SCO Universal Center for Countering Security Challenges and Threats and the SCO Anti-drug Center, and decided to set up the SCO Development Bank. Member-states of the SCO issued statements which expressed a fair stance in support of the multilateral trading system, and a just voice for defending the achievements of the victory in the Second World War.

This was a summit that focused on development. The leaders adopted the SCO's development strategy for the next decade.

Against this backdrop, Mr. Xi announced that China would establish three major platforms for China-SCO cooperation in energy, green industry, and the digital economy, and set up three major cooperation centres for scientific and technological innovation, higher education and also vocational and technical education. These initiatives are open to all member-states, providing the organisation with new opportunities and empowering the region's sustainable development.

It was a summit leading global governance. In response to the governance deficit facing today's



**Xu Feihong**  
is China's  
Ambassador to India

China stands ready to work with India in enhancing cooperation under the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

world, Mr. Xi put forth the Global Governance Initiative, calling for adhering to sovereign equality, abiding by international rule of law, practising multilateralism, advocating a people-centered approach, and focusing on taking real actions, which became the biggest highlight of this summit.

Since joining the SCO in 2017, India has played an important role in advancing the SCO's development. China deeply appreciates Mr. Modi's and India's full support for China's SCO presidency. China stands ready to work with India to enhance cooperation under the framework of SCO in various areas such as security, financing, energy, green industry and the digital economy, to better improve the well-being of their people.

### **The diamond jubilee of ties**

This year marks the 75th anniversary of China-India diplomatic ties. In Tianjin, Mr. Xi and Mr. Modi reached new, important and common understandings on growing China-India relations further. Mr. Xi pointed out that it should be the right choice for China and India to be good neighbourly friends and partners who help each other succeed, and have the dragon and the elephant dance together. Mr. Modi also stated that India and China are partners, not rivals.

Their consensus far outweighs their disagreement. India is ready to view and develop the bilateral ties from a long-term perspective.

We should uphold the important and common understandings reached by the two leaders as guidance, and push bilateral relations forward for more practical progress.

First, we should further consolidate strategic mutual trust. We should earnestly draw the lessons from the past 75 years, strengthen correct strategic perception, explore right ways for neighbouring major countries to get along with each other, which are characterised by mutual respect and trust, peaceful coexistence, pursuit of common development, and win-win cooperation, and gradually resume various

mechanisms for dialogue and exchange between the two governments.

Second, we should further expand exchanges and cooperation. We should focus on development, which is the biggest common denominator of the two countries, and promote mutual support and success, and better facilitate trade and investment flows. The Chinese side is ready to strengthen cooperation with the Indian side in technology, education, culture, tourism and poverty alleviation, and promote exchanges and communications between political parties, think-tanks, media and the youth, so as to expand the convergence of interests and promote people-to-people bonds.

Third, we should further enhance good-neighbourliness and friendship. We should continue to uphold the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence initiated by the older generation of Chinese and Indian leaders, truly respect each other's core interests and major concerns, and combine our strength to maintain peace and tranquillity in the border areas. We should not allow the boundary question that was left over from the past to define current China-India relations, nor let specific differences affect bilateral cooperation, so as to ensure the sound and stable development of China-India relations.

### **The road ahead**

As the world's two most populous major developing countries and important members of the Global South, China and India share common interests in pursuing development and revitalisation, maintaining world peace and stability, and promoting global governance. India and China will successively assume the BRICS presidency in the next two years. China stands ready to work with India to support each other's presidency, deepen and strengthen greater BRICS cooperation, jointly implement the Global Governance Initiative, resolutely oppose bullying and hegemony, defend international fairness and justice, and join hands to build a community with a shared future for humanity.

## 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.

## Pathways for Strengthening Relations

- ❑ 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.
- ❑ 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.
- ❑ 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.

# Himachal declared fully literate State

## Fully Literate State in India

- ❑ Himachal Pradesh has been declared ‘fully literate’, joining Goa, Ladakh, Mizoram, and Tripura.
- ❑ However, ‘fully literate’ does not imply 100% literacy.
- ❑ It means the state has achieved a literacy rate above 95%, with Himachal recording 99.3%.

## Himachal declared ‘fully literate’: what does this mean?

ABHINAYA HARIGOVIND  
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 10

EARLIER THIS week, Himachal Pradesh was declared a ‘fully literate’ state — the fifth such state/Union Territory after Goa, Ladakh, Mizoram, and Tripura.

None of these, however, have 100% literacy. Himachal claims to have a literacy rate of 99.3%, Goa 99.72%, Mizoram 98.2%, Tripura 95.6%, and Ladakh 97%. So what does it mean to be ‘fully literate’?

### How is literacy defined?

The Ministry of Education defines literacy as ‘the ability to read, write, and compute with comprehension i.e. to identify, understand, interpret and create, along with critical life skills such as digital literacy, financial literacy etc.’ It defines ‘full literacy’ as ‘achieving 95% literacy in a State/UT’.

The Ministry communicated these definitions to states/UTs last August. It felt the need to define these terms for ULLAS (Understanding Lifelong Learning for All in Society), a literacy programme for people over 15 who may not have attended school.

The ULLAS program was launched in 2022 with the aim of achieving 100% literacy by 2030, which is one of the 17

Sustainable Development Goals of the UN. The program is also in line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 which calls for adult education initiatives to achieve 100% literacy.

### How does an individual attain ‘literacy’?

Under the ULLAS program, adult learners are taught basic reading, writing, and math (arithmetic like addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division) that a child in school would learn up to class 3. They are also taught how to read and measure time, make sense of calendars, use currency notes, write cheques,

### OTHER ADULT LITERACY SCHEMES

ULLAS is latest of govt initiatives to promote adult literacy from 1950s onward

■ In 1960s-70s, the Centre and several states ran programs targeting literacy among farmers and women.

■ The National Literacy Mission, which ran from 1988 to 2009, also targeted this age bracket.

■ The National Adult Education Programme was launched in 1978 to eliminate illiteracy in 15-35 group.

■ ‘Saakshar Bharat’ (Literate India) mission ran from 2009-18. Meant for ages 15 and above, it also focused on functional literacy and numeracy.

and safely make digital transactions.

This training is provided either through a mobile app or offline, by students or community volunteers. Then, the Functional Literacy Numeracy Assessment Test (FLNAT), a 150-mark reading, writing and numeracy test, is administered in the person’s chosen language. On passing the test, the learner is certified by the National Institute of Open

Schooling (NIOS) as having acquired foundational literacy and numeracy.

### How does a state become ‘fully literate’?

To learn who requires training under the ULLAS program, states conduct door-to-door surveys, or rely on other data. (More later.) Those identified as not being literate are given requisite training and administered FLNAT.

The key to some states/UTs receiving the ‘fully literate’ tag is that the adults they identified as not being literate have cleared the FLNAT. This relies on their prior estimates of the number of people who are not literate.

In states/UTs where literacy levels (as per the 2011 Census) are already high, or where the population is relatively small, the process of identifying people who are not literate, imparting training, and making them clear the FLNAT works faster.

As per the Census of 2011, Goa had a literacy rate of 88.7%, Himachal Pradesh 82.8%, Mizoram 91.3%, and Tripura 87.2% — well above the country average of 74%.

### How has literacy been measured so far?

For the 2011 Census, any person aged 7 and above who could read and write with understanding in any language was considered literate. Among women, the literacy rate was 64.6%; for men it was 80.9%. The Census also measured adult literacy — for those aged 15 and above — for which the national figure

was 69.3%. Since the 2011 Census, sample surveys by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation have been used to measure literacy.

■ The National Sample Survey (NSS) 71st round (Jan-June 2014) showed an adult literacy rate of 71%. For Goa, this figure was 90%, while it was 83% in Himachal Pradesh, 96% in Mizoram, and 86% in Tripura. The NSS uses a similar definition for literacy as the Census — of being able to read and write with understanding in any language.

■ The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) for 2023-24 showed a national literacy rate of 77.5% (aged 7 and above; similar definition of literacy as Census). For Tripura, this was 93.7%, for Mizoram 98.2%, for Goa 93.6%, and for Himachal 88.8%.

The report estimated that 22.3% of people aged 15 and above were not literate. This figure was 2.2% in Mizoram, 7.3% in Goa, 7.4% in Tripura, and 12.7% in Himachal. It was the highest in Bihar (33.1%) followed by Andhra Pradesh (31.5%) and Madhya Pradesh (28.9%).

## Defining Literacy and Full Literacy in India

- ❑ The Ministry of Education defines literacy as the ability to read, write, and compute with comprehension, including skills like digital and financial literacy.
- ❑ A State/UT is considered **'fully literate'** when it achieves 95% literacy.
- ❑ These definitions were issued in August 2023 for the ULLAS programme, launched in 2022 to promote adult education for those above 15.
- ❑ Aimed at achieving 100% literacy by 2030, ULLAS aligns with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and India's National Education Policy 2020.

## ULLAS Programme

- ❑ ULLAS (Understanding Lifelong Learning for All in Society) is a national adult education initiative launched in 2022 by the Ministry of Education.
- ❑ It targets individuals aged 15 and above who missed formal schooling, aiming to equip them with reading, writing, numeracy, digital skills, and financial literacy.



## How Literacy is Attained under ULLAS

- ❑ Under the ULLAS programme, adults are taught basic reading, writing, and arithmetic (up to Class 3 level), along with practical skills like reading time, using calendars, handling money, writing cheques, and making safe digital transactions.
- ❑ Training is delivered via a mobile app or offline by students and community volunteers.
- ❑ Learners then take the Functional Literacy Numeracy Assessment Test (FLNAT), a 150-mark test in their chosen language.
- ❑ Successful candidates are certified by the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) as having achieved foundational literacy and numeracy.

## Measuring Literacy in India

- ❑ In the 2011 Census, literacy was defined as the ability to read and write with understanding in any language for those aged seven and above.
- ❑ The literacy rate stood at 80.9% for men and 64.6% for women, while adult literacy (15+) was 69.3%.

# Mining of Critical and Atomic Minerals

## No public consultations for mining of critical and atomic minerals: Govt

NIKHIL GHANEKAR  
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 10

THE MINISTRY of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has said that it will now exempt mining proposals of atomic, critical, and strategic minerals from the ambit of public consultations in view of "national defence and security requirements and strategic considerations".

In an office memorandum dated September 8, the Ministry said the exemption has been granted in response to a request made recently by the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE).

However, such projects will be subjected to a "comprehensive appraisal" by concerned sectoral expert appraisal committees, and they will be appraised at the central level, irrespective of the project size, the memo stated.

The Ministry's decision is in line with other changes made this year for speedy appraisal and approval of critical and strategic mineral projects. The Centre already has a separate category for critical minerals on its online clearance window portal Parivesh, at the request of the Ministry of Mines.

To grant the latest relaxation, the Ministry cited provisions of the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2006, and amendments, which exempt projects related to national defence and security, as well as other strategic considerations, from public consultation.

"The above matter has been examined in this Ministry vis-à-vis the prevailing provisions under EIA, 2006, and keeping in view the national defence and security requirement and strategic considerations, all mining projects of atomic minerals notified in part B and critical and strategic minerals

notified in Part D of the First schedule of MMDR Act shall be exempted from Public Consultation... and will be appraised at the Central level irrespective of the lease area involved in the proposal," the memo stated.

The EIA Notification is a key Government regulation that is central to screening and appraising the impacts of developmental and industrial projects on environment, health and communities. Under this Notification, public consultation is a legal process, and involves a public hearing for addressing concerns of affected communities, and seeks written responses from those who have a stake in the impact of projects.

In its request to the Environment Ministry on August 4, the Defence Ministry highlighted that rare earth elements are used in the defence sector. It said they are used to produce surveillance and navigational aids (such as radar

and sonar), communication and display aids, mounting systems in armed vehicles and tanks, and precision guided munitions.

The Defence Ministry underlined that mineral resources for rare earths are scarce in India, and with supply concentration in limited parts of the world, it poses a "huge supply risk for the country and requires a steady supply of rare earth elements from domestic mines."

"Accordingly, the Ministry of Defence has requested that mining projects related to critical and strategic minerals may be considered as projects concerning National Defence and security or involving other strategic considerations and may be exempted from public consultations for the grant of Environmental Clearances," the memo stated.

Meanwhile, in a separate letter sent to the Ministry on August 29, the DAE highlighted that tho-

rium extracted from monazite, a beach sand material, is a fuel source for use in the third-stage atomic energy programme. It added there is a need for the enhancement of production of these minerals, including uranium, by way of operationalisation of new deposits of beach sand minerals and uranium. It thus sought an exemption from public consultation.

There are 24 critical minerals listed in the schedules of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, which include Lithium, Nickel, Tungsten, Titanium, Graphite, to name a few. Till date, 34 critical and strategic mineral blocks have been successfully auctioned by the Centre. The Government cleared setting up of National Critical Mineral Mission earlier this year with an expenditure of ₹16,300 crore from 2024-25 to 2030-31.

FULL REPORT

[www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com)

## Context

- ❑ The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) exempted mining proposals of atomic, critical, and strategic minerals from public consultations citing national defence and strategic requirements.

## Policy Decision

- ❑ The exemption applies to minerals notified in **Part D of the First Schedule of the MMDR Act**.
- ❑ Minerals include **Lithium, Nickel, Tungsten, Titanium, Graphite**, uranium, and beach sand minerals.
- ❑ Projects are still appraised under the **Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2006**, and assessed by **sectoral expert committees**.

## Rationale and Strategic Significance

- ❑ The move was requested by the **Defence Ministry** and **Department of Atomic Energy**.
- ❑ Minerals are crucial for **national defence, strategic sectors, communication, navigation, and precision weapons**.
- ❑ Public consultations are considered **exempt** due to potential **security risks** and scarcity of rare earths in India.



## Procedural and Legal Context

- ❑ EIA Notification normally mandates public hearings and written responses for development projects.
- ❑ This exemption is specific to **critical and strategic mineral projects**, not general mining.
- ❑ The exemption is accompanied by **central-level appraisal** and sectoral review to maintain environmental oversight.



The infographic features a background image of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Minister Piyush Goyal standing in front of a large open-pit mine. The text is presented in a white rounded rectangle with a yellow wavy border at the bottom. The title 'Critical Mineral Mission' is prominently displayed, followed by two bullet points detailing the mission's goals and scope. The Indian emblem and the motto 'सत्यमेव जयते' are visible in the top right corner.

### Critical Mineral Mission

- The Critical Mineral Mission is an initiative aimed at securing a reliable supply of critical minerals essential for economic development, technological innovation, and national security.
- This mission encompasses various strategies and actions taken by governments, industries, and international organizations to ensure the availability of these vital resources.



# Thank you

## Address

**B-47, Main Road Shivalik Enclave, Block-  
B, Shivalik Colony, Malviya Nagar, New  
Delhi-110017**

**Phone Number +91 8178833167**