Sir Creek Dispute

The **Sir Creek dispute** is a border issue between **India and Pakistan** in the **Rann of Kutch, Gujarat**, with its roots in colonial-era agreements. Though less contentious than Kashmir, it holds **strategic, economic, ecological, and legal significance**—making it important for **UPSC Prelims, Mains (GS-II: IR), and Essays**.

1 What is Sir Creek?

- Length: 96 km strip of water in the marshes of the Rann of Kutch (Gujarat).
- Location: Between Kutch (India) and Sindh (Pakistan).
- Opens into: Arabian Sea.
- Old name: Ban Ganga (renamed Sir Creek during British rule).

2 What is the Dispute?

• Root issue: Different interpretations of the boundary line.

Pakistan's Position

- Based on **Bombay Government Resolution**, **1914** (agreement between **Rao of Kutch** & **Sindh Government**).
- Claims entire creek belongs to Pakistan.
- Argues the eastern bank (green line) is the boundary.

India's Position

- Refers to 1925 map + 1924 mid-channel pillars.
- Claims boundary lies mid-channel (red line).
- Cites Thalweg Principle of International Law:
 - Boundary follows the navigable channel's midline.
 - India argues Sir Creek is navigable at high tide (fishing boats pass).

Pakistan's Counter

• Rejects Thalweg principle → says Sir Creek is **not navigable**.

3 Origins of the Dispute

• **1908**: Dispute started → collection of firewood in the creek.

• 1914 Bombay Resolution:

- **Para 9**: Boundary = east bank (supports Pakistan).
- **Para 10**: Boundary = mid-channel (supports India, since creek is navigable).
- This contradiction created long-term ambiguity.

4 Why is Sir Creek Important?

1. Strategic Importance

- Military clashes occurred in 1965 Indo-Pak war.
- Maritime boundary influences security in Arabian Sea.

2. Economic Value

- Rich fishing grounds → one of Asia's largest.
- Possible oil & natural gas reserves under the seabed.

3. Ecological Significance

- Wetland habitat for flamingoes and migratory birds.
- Part of sensitive Rann of Kutch ecosystem.

4. Humanitarian Issue

- Fishermen often cross unmarked border unknowingly.
- Arrests and imprisonment on both sides.

5 Attempts to Resolve the Issue

- 1965: British PM Harold Wilson mediated after the war.
 - Tribunal set up → verdict in 1968 → Pakistan got 10% of its claim.

- **1997**: Composite Dialogue resumed → Sir Creek included.
- 1999: Tension after Pak Navy aircraft shot down near Sir Creek.
- 2005-2007: Joint hydrographic surveys carried out.
- Current Status:
 - Issue unresolved.
 - Considered a "low-hanging fruit" compared to bigger disputes (like Kashmir).

6 Challenges in Resolution

- Legal Ambiguity in 1914 Resolution.
- Conflicting interpretations of Thalweg principle.
- Distrust between India and Pakistan.
- Linkages with larger disputes (Kashmir, terrorism).

7 Way Forward

- Confidence-Building Measures: Release fishermen, joint patrolling.
- Bilateral Dialogue: Resume Composite/Backchannel talks.
- Joint Resource Sharing: Explore oil, gas, and fishing grounds together.
- International Law-Based Solution: Neutral arbitration on Thalweg principle.
- Maritime Cooperation: Use dispute resolution to improve Indo-Pak maritime trust.

8 UPSC Relevance

Prelims

- Location-based Os: Where is Sir Creek?
- International Law: Thalweg Principle.

Mains (GS Paper-II)

- Discuss the significance of the Sir Creek dispute in India-Pakistan relations.
- How does international law apply to the Sir Creek boundary issue?

Essay Paper

• "Border disputes in South Asia and their impact on regional peace and development".

□□ Key Takeaways

- Sir Creek dispute = colonial-era legacy.
- Importance lies in security, economy, ecology, and law.
- Despite being unresolved, it is **easier to settle** than other India-Pakistan disputes.
- For UPSC, link Sir Creek with India's maritime security, Indo-Pak relations, and international law.

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