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**.

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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).

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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

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

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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.

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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.

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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**.

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- **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).

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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).

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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.

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8 UPSC Relevance

Prelims

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

Mains (GS Paper-II)

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- *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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