

INDIA'S CLAIM OVER CONTINENTAL SELF IN ARABIAN SEA : GEOGRAPHY

NEWS: India skirts maritime border dispute with Pakistan by fresh continental-shelf claim

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

India has submitted a revised claim to the UN's CLCS for an additional 10,000 sq. km in the Central Arabian Sea, aiming to expand its extended continental shelf and secure sovereign seabed mining rights. The move navigates past disputes with Pakistan and Oman, reinforcing India's maritime and strategic interests.

Context: India's Strategic Maritime Move

- India has submitted a **revised claim to the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS)** to secure recognition of an **additional 10,000 sq. km** of seabed in the **Central Arabian Sea**.
- This move is aimed at **advancing India's sovereign rights over seabed resources** such as minerals, hydrocarbons, and rare earths.

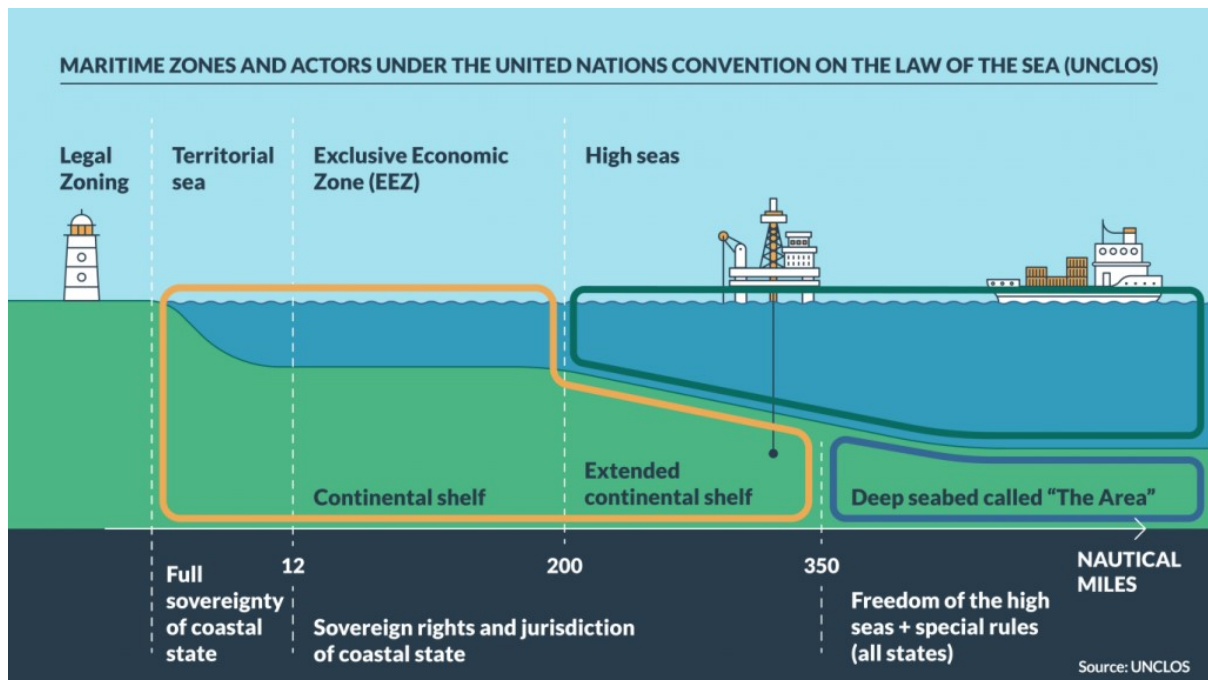
Understanding the Continental Shelf and Extended Continental Shelf (ECS)

- **Continental Shelf:**
 - The submerged part of the continent extending beyond the shoreline, up to **200 nautical miles** from a country's coast.
 - Governed by the **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)** concept under UNCLOS, which gives a coastal state rights over resources like fishing, energy, and seabed mining.
- **Extended Continental Shelf (ECS):**
 - A country can claim additional seabed beyond 200 nautical miles if it can **scientifically prove** that the seabed is a **natural extension of its landmass**.
 - The claim must be submitted to the **CLCS**, a UN body under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).
 - If approved, the state gets **exclusive sovereign rights** for exploration and exploitation of seabed and subsoil resources in the ECS (but **not water column rights** like fishing).

India's Revised Claim and Maritime Expansion

- India's **latest submission** seeks to add **10,000 sq. km** to its ECS in the **Central Arabian Sea**, through modified and segmented claims.
- This builds on India's **earlier ECS submissions** in both eastern (Bay of Bengal) and western (Arabian Sea) maritime zones.

- Upon full approval, India's **submerged sovereign area** (EEZ + ECS) could reach **~3.2 million sq. km**, nearly equal to its **landmass**.



Strategic and Economic Significance

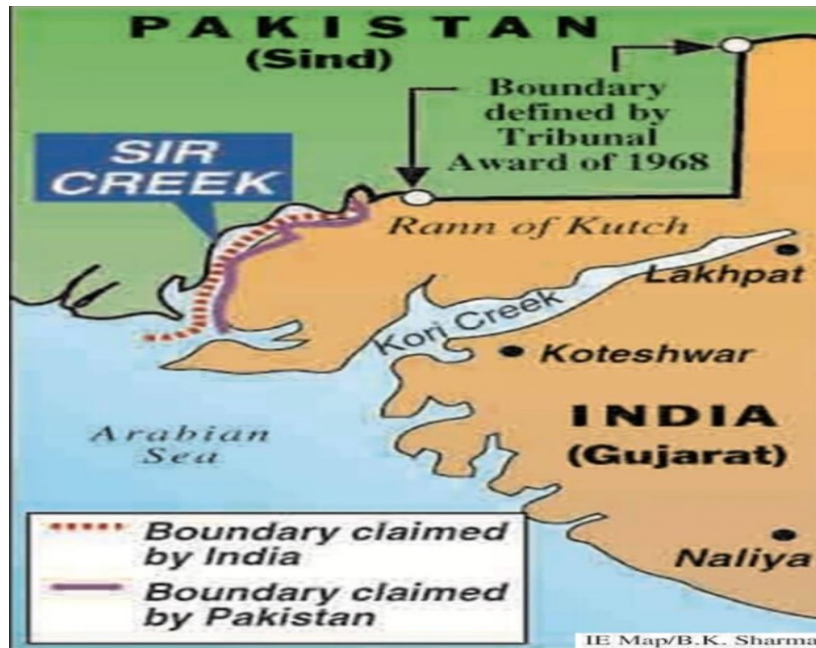
- Potential for **commercial mining** of **polymetallic nodules**, hydrocarbons, cobalt, and rare earth elements.
- Strengthens India's maritime footprint and **Blue Economy strategy**.
- Enhances **strategic depth** in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), contributing to national security and energy self-reliance.
- Allows greater scope for **scientific exploration**, under India's Deep Ocean Mission and international collaborations.

India's Maritime Boundary Disputes and Legal Challenges

1. With Pakistan – Sir Creek Dispute:

- **Sir Creek** is a **96-km tidal estuary** in the Indus Delta between **Gujarat (India)** and **Sindh (Pakistan)**.
- The dispute over boundary demarcation affects **baseline drawing** and subsequent EEZ and ECS claims.

- **2021:** Pakistan raised objections to parts of India's Western offshore ECS claim, alleging **overlap of ~100 nautical miles**.
- **2023:** CLCS rejected India's **entire ECS submission in the Arabian Sea**.
- **2025:** India split the claim into **two partial submissions**, isolating the Central Arabian Sea claim from the disputed western region.



2. With Oman – Overlapping Claims in Arabian Sea:

- India's ECS overlaps with Oman's claimed continental shelf.
- **2010 Agreement:** Both nations agreed to **not treat this as a formal dispute**, pending delimitation of maritime boundaries.
- This **mutual understanding** has prevented escalation or CLCS rejection.

3. On the Eastern and Southern Coasts – Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean:

- India submitted claims covering **~300,000 sq. km** in the eastern ECS region.
- **Myanmar and Sri Lanka** have submitted **contestations** to parts of these claims.
- CLCS is expected to **hold consultations and hearings later this year** to review competing submissions.

India's Approach to CLCS Engagement

- India is leveraging **scientific oceanographic studies**, conducted by agencies like NIOT, NCPOR, and the Geological Survey of India, to back its ECS claims.

- India's strategy includes:
 - **Splitting submissions** to avoid regional disputes (e.g., separating Arabian Sea from Sir Creek overlaps).
 - Adhering to CLCS procedures while maintaining **bilateral diplomacy** with neighbouring states.
 - Ensuring claims are consistent with UNCLOS norms and **precedents from other accepted ECS submissions**.

Conclusion

- India's revised ECS submission reflects a **well-calculated maritime strategy**, blending **international legal mechanisms, scientific backing, and geopolitical caution**.
- If successful, India's continental shelf could match its land area, granting vast **strategic and economic rights over deep-sea resources**.
- As global competition over seabed resources intensifies, India's timely and structured approach could secure long-term gains in the **Blue Economy, energy security, and maritime sovereignty**.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-skirts-maritime-border-dispute-with-pakistan-by-fresh-continental-shelf-claim/article69493962.ece>