

## PLACES IN NEWS

### SANDY CAY REEF

NEWS: China and the Philippines defended their claims to a disputed reef in the South China Sea, after Manila accused Beijing of seeking to “intimidate and harass” with a state media report that suggested the area had been seized.

### WHAT’S IN THE NEWS?

#### About the Disputed Sandy Cay Reef

- **Location & Geography:**  
Sandy Cay is a small sandbank reef located near **Thitu Island** (known as *Pag-asa* in the Philippines), which is part of the **Spratly Islands** in the South China Sea.
- **Size:**  
The Sandy Cay reef is extremely small, measuring slightly over **200 square metres**, essentially a sandbar with limited landmass but high strategic value.
- **Philippine Presence:**  
The Philippines maintains a **military garrison and coast guard monitoring base** on nearby Thitu Island, enabling it to observe activities in the surrounding waters, including Chinese movements.
- **Strategic Value for China:**  
Despite its small size, Sandy Cay holds **geopolitical importance**. According to international law, **even a small land feature like Sandy Cay can generate a 12-nautical-mile territorial sea**, thereby influencing maritime control.
- **Overlapping Claims:**  
The **12-nautical-mile zone** around Sandy Cay **overlaps with that of Thitu Island**, intensifying the **territorial friction** between the Philippines and China in this sensitive maritime region.

## Understanding the South China Sea Dispute

### Geopolitical Importance

- **Vital Trade Route:**  
The South China Sea is a **strategic maritime corridor** connecting the Indian Ocean to Northeast Asia. It is essential for the movement of cargo to and from major economies like **China, Japan, South Korea, and Russia**.



## Territorial Disputes

- **Multiple Claimants:**  
Several countries—**China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei**—have overlapping territorial claims over **islands, reefs, and maritime zones** in the South China Sea.
- **China's "Nine-Dash Line" Claim:**  
China asserts sovereignty over nearly the **entire South China Sea**, citing historical usage reflected in a **1947 map** marked by the "**nine-dash line**".
  - **Taiwan** also claims the same area, aligning its position with that of the People's Republic of China.

## Counterclaims from Other Countries

- **Vietnam:**  
Asserts that it has had **continuous and effective control** over the **Paracel and Spratly Islands** since the **17th century**, supported by **historical documentation**.
- **Philippines:**  
Bases its claims on **geographic proximity** and exercises **effective occupation** of certain features, such as the **Spratly Islands and Scarborough Shoal**.
  - These areas are also **claimed and patrolled by China**, leading to frequent confrontations.
- **Malaysia and Brunei:**  
Claim portions of the sea that **fall within their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs)**, as defined by the **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**.

### International Legal Developments

- **Philippines v. China Arbitration (2013–2016):**  
In **2013**, the Philippines initiated a legal case against China at the **Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA)** in The Hague, challenging China's maritime claims.
- **2016 PCA Ruling:**  
The tribunal ruled in **favor of the Philippines**, declaring that:
  - **China's "nine-dash line"** had **no legal basis** under international law.
  - **China's activities**, such as land reclamation and interference with Philippine fishing and oil exploration, **violated UNCLOS** provisions.
- **Rejection by China:**  
Despite being a **signatory to UNCLOS**, **China refused to recognize or accept the ruling**, continuing to assert de facto control through military and paramilitary presence in disputed areas.

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/creqp4lxl4o>