

PLACES IN NEWS: WEEK 2: 8th june-14 june

Topic 1: South China Sea and East China Sea

Context: The dispute flared up significantly when Japan and the Philippines announced talks to formalize and solidify their maritime borders. China, which claims almost the entire region via its "Nine-Dash Line," forcefully opposed these talks. In retaliation, China escalated tensions by sending vessels to harass and intimidate Taiwanese ships, claiming this was a response to the "breach" of their regional authority.

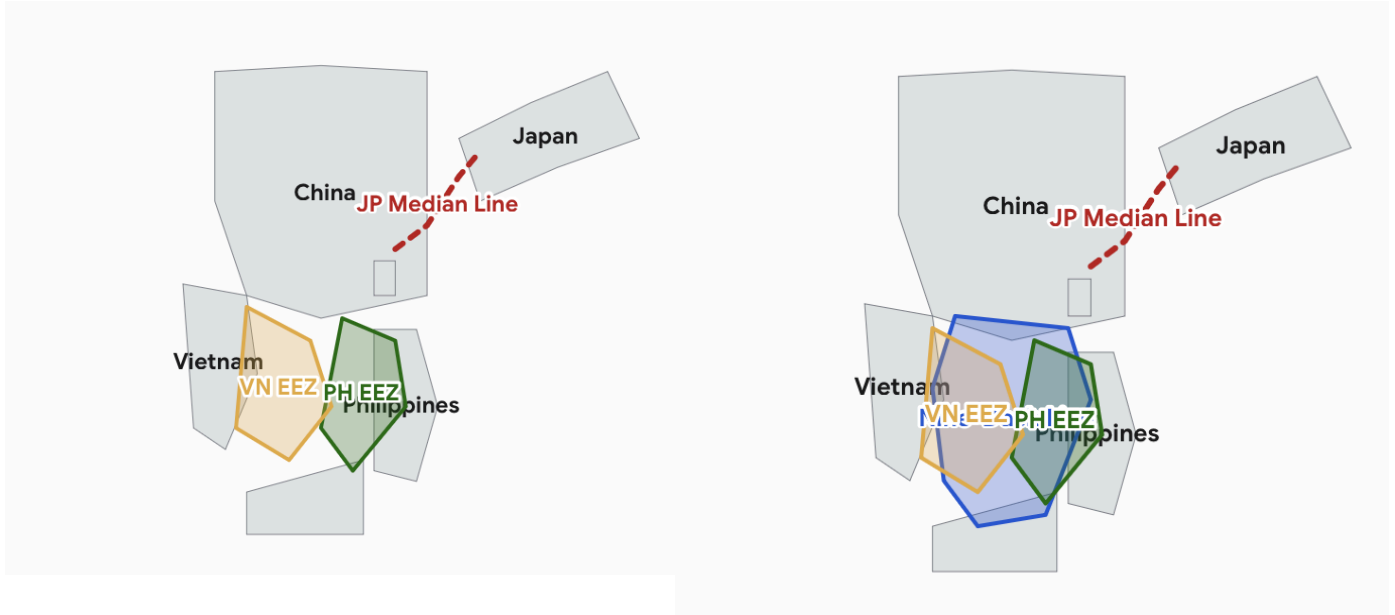
The Strategic Importance of the Region

Both the South China Sea and East China Sea act as vital arteries for the global economy.

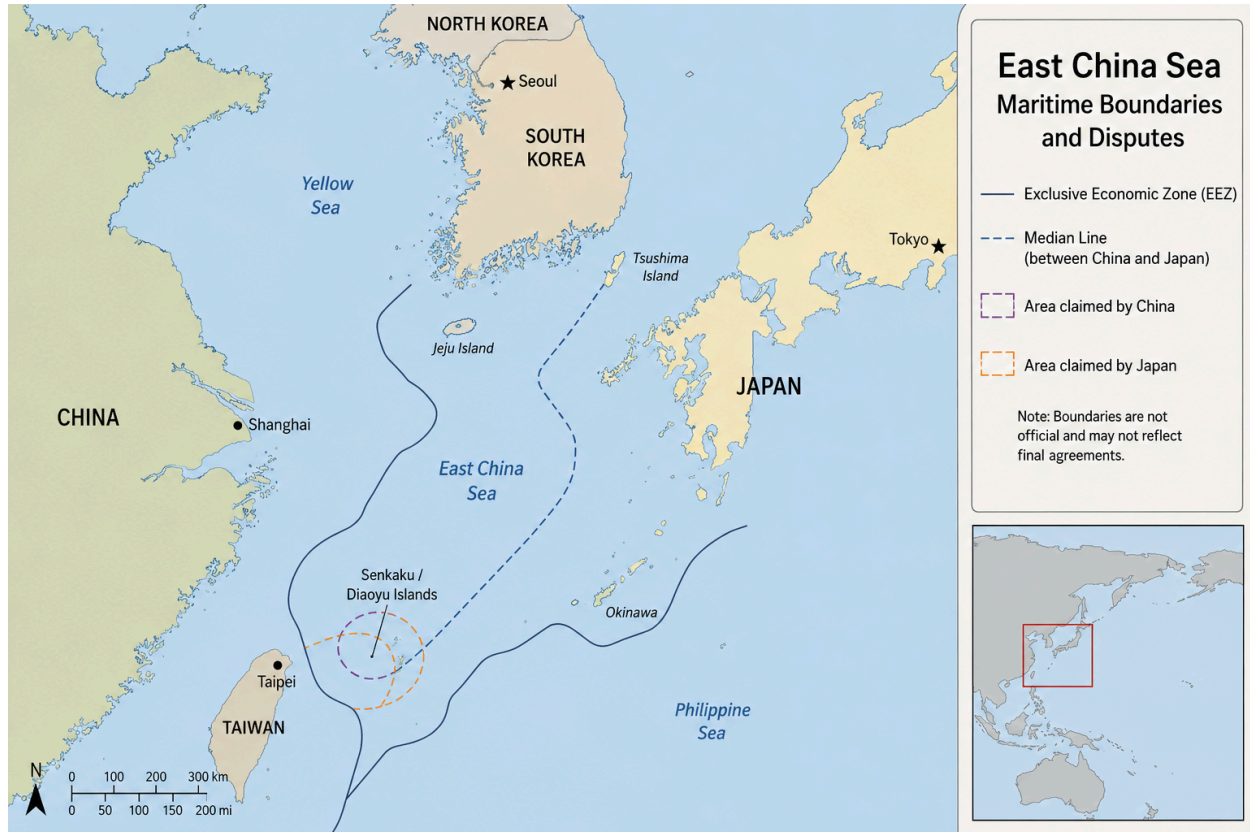
- **Trade:** Over half of the world's merchant fleet tonnage sails through these waters. The South China Sea connects the Indian Ocean to the Pacific, seeing nearly \$3 trillion in trade annually.
- **Resources:** Beneath the seabed lie massive reserves. The South China Sea holds an estimated 11 billion barrels of oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. The East China Sea also contains highly lucrative, untapped natural gas fields.
- **Fisheries:** These waters are home to rich fishing grounds that sustain the livelihoods of millions across Southeast Asia.

South China Sea:

The Geography: The South China Sea is a marginal sea surrounded by China to the north, Vietnam to the west, the Philippines to the east, and Malaysia and Brunei to the south. It is dotted with hundreds of small, mostly uninhabited islands, reefs, and shoals. The two most heavily contested island groups are the **Paracel Islands** (in the north) and the **Spratly Islands** (in the south).







Topic 2: Yemen & The Red Sea (Bab-el-Mandeb Strait)

The Geography: Yemen is situated at the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula. Its coastline controls the eastern side of the **Bab-el-Mandeb Strait**, a narrow waterway of immense strategic importance that connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean.

- Any ship traveling between Europe and Asia via the Suez Canal must pass through the Red Sea and the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait.
- **Surrounding Red Sea Nations:** Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea, and Djibouti (which sits directly across the strait from Yemen).
- **The "Two Horns":** In the north, the Red Sea splits into the Gulf of Suez (leading to the Suez Canal) and the **Gulf of Aqaba**, which provides Israel (via the Eilat Port) and Jordan (via the Port of Aqaba) access to the Red Sea.

The Bab-el-Mandeb Strait (translating to the "Gate of Tears") is an incredibly narrow waterway—only about 29 km wide at its narrowest point.

- **Eastern Flank:** Controlled by Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula.
- **Western Flank:** Controlled by Djibouti and Eritrea on the Horn of Africa.

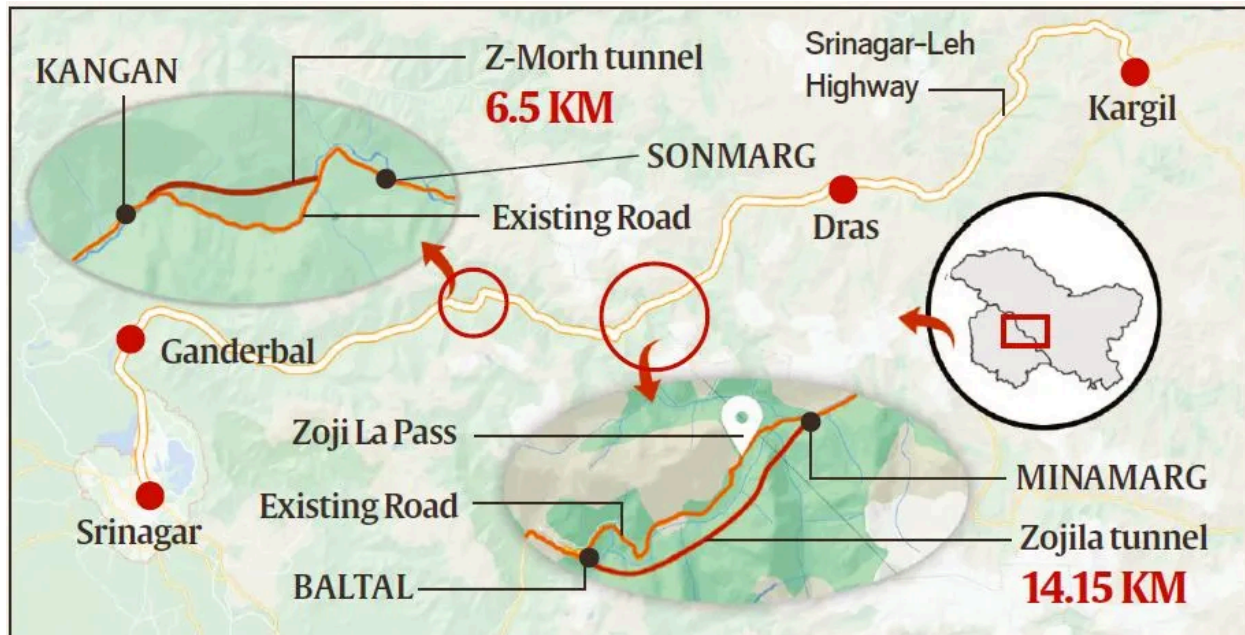
At its northern end, **the Red Sea splits** into two "horns" wrapped around the Sinai Peninsula:

- **The Gulf of Suez (West):** Leads entirely through Egyptian territory to the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean Sea.
- **The Gulf of Aqaba (East):** Bordered by Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.



Topic 3: Zozi La tunnel

Context: The Zojila Tunnel is one of the most ambitious and strategically critical mountain infrastructure projects in India's history. As of June 2026, the project achieved a historic milestone with its final "breakthrough"—meaning the excavation from both ends of the mountain has successfully connected in the middle.



Topic 4: River Interlinking Projects: Ken-Betwa & Parbati-Kalisindh-Chambal Links (Madhya Pradesh/Rajasthan); Godavari-Krishna-Cauvery Link

The river interlinking projects are part of India's massive national strategy to solve a geographical paradox: some regions face devastating annual floods while others suffer from chronic, severe droughts. The core idea is to build a network of canals and reservoirs to transfer water from "surplus" river basins to "deficit" ones.

Here is a breakdown of the three major projects discussed in the progress report, their geographical foundations, and the controversies surrounding them.

1. The Ken-Betwa Link (Central India)



Ken-Betwa Link and Panna Tiger Reserve.

The Geography: Both the Ken and Betwa are north-flowing rivers that originate in the **Vindhya Range** in Madhya Pradesh and act as major tributaries to the Yamuna River.

- **Ken River:** Originates near Katni (MP).
- **Betwa River:** Originates in the Raisen district (MP).

The Objective: This is India's first major river interlinking project. Its primary goal is to transfer surplus water from the Ken basin to the Betwa basin to irrigate the **Bundelkhand region**—a historically drought-prone, arid zone spread across the borders of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

The Controversy (Panna Tiger Reserve): The project faces massive backlash from environmentalists because the proposed 221-kilometer concrete canal will cut directly through the core habitat of the **Panna Tiger Reserve**. Constructing the Daudhan Dam to facilitate this transfer will submerge thousands of hectares of prime forest, disrupting the delicate woodland ecosystem and threatening the local tiger population.

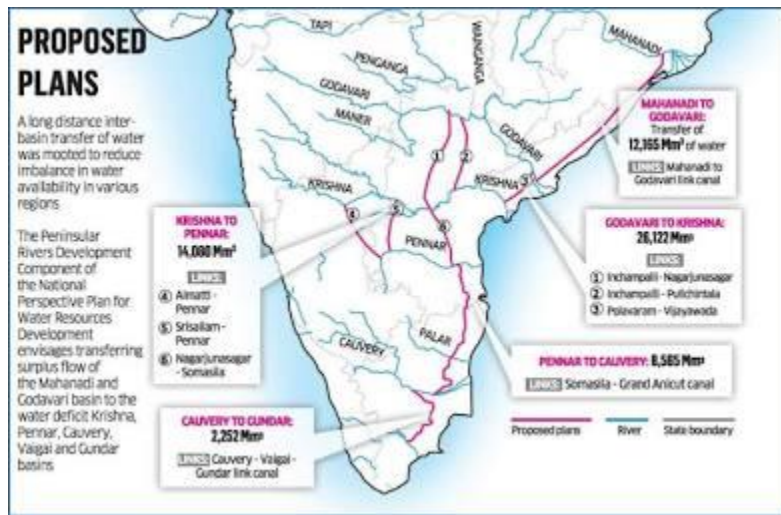
2. Parbati-Kalisindh-Chambal Link (Central/Western India)

The Geography: Like the Ken and Betwa, these three rivers also originate from the Vindhyas in Madhya Pradesh:

- **Parbati:** Originates in the Sehore district.
- **Kalisindh:** Originates in the Dewas district.
- **Chambal:** Originates from the Janapav hills (Singarchouri peak) near Indore.

The Objective: This project aims to optimize the water resources of the Chambal basin. The goal is to route water to the drought-prone **Malwa Plateau** in Madhya Pradesh and several parched districts in eastern Rajasthan. It is a highly cooperative project; both state governments recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to fast-track its development.

3. Godavari-Krishna-Cauvery Link (Peninsular India)



Peninsular River Interlinking Plan.

The Geography: Unlike the central rivers born in the Vindhyas, these three massive peninsular rivers all originate in the **Western Ghats** and flow eastward across the Deccan Plateau to form massive deltas in the Bay of Bengal.

- **Godavari:** Originates at Trimbakeshwar in Nashik, Maharashtra.
- **Krishna:** Originates at Mahabaleshwar in Maharashtra.
- **Cauvery:** Originates at the Brahmagiri Hills in the Kodagu (Coorg) district of Karnataka.

The Objective: This is the southern mega-linkage. The Godavari basin receives heavy rainfall and frequently experiences flooding, possessing a "surplus" of water. Conversely, the Krishna and Cauvery basins are heavily over-drawn and frequently run dry, leading to intense political water disputes between Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh.

The strategy is to push Godavari water southward.

- **Phase 1 (Completed):** The Godavari and Krishna rivers have already been successfully linked in Andhra Pradesh via the **Polavaram Dam** and the **Pattiseema Lift Irrigation Project**.

- **Phase 2 (Proposed):** The current plan in Parliament outlines extending this network further south, taking the Godavari-Krishna water and channeling it down into the Cauvery basin to permanently resolve the water deficits in Tamil Nadu.

Practice MCQS

Q1. Consider the following pairs:

Sea/Strait	Connects
1. Bab-el-Mandeb Strait	Red Sea and Gulf of Aden
2. Suez Canal	Mediterranean Sea and Red Sea
3. Strait of Hormuz	Red Sea and Arabian Sea

Which of the pairs given above is/are correctly matched?

- A) 1 and 2 only
- B) 2 and 3 only
- C) 1 and 3 only
- D) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: A) 1 and 2 only

Explanation: Bab-el-Mandeb connects the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden. Suez Canal connects the Red Sea with the Mediterranean Sea. Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman, not the Red Sea.

2. The Bab-el-Mandeb Strait lies between which of the following regions?

- A) Egypt and Saudi Arabia
- B) Yemen and Djibouti/Eritrea
- C) Oman and Iran
- D) Somalia and India

Answer: B) Yemen and Djibouti/Eritrea

Explanation: Bab-el-Mandeb is a narrow strategic strait between Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula and Djibouti/Eritrea on the Horn of Africa.

3. Consider the following statements regarding the East China Sea:

1. It lies between China, Taiwan, South Korea and Japan.
2. The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands are located in the East China Sea.
3. The East China Sea is directly connected to the Mediterranean Sea through the Suez Canal.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A) 1 and 2 only
- B) 2 and 3 only
- C) 1 and 3 only
- D) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: A) 1 and 2 only

Explanation: The East China Sea lies between China, Taiwan, Korea and Japan. The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands are disputed islands located in this sea. It has no direct connection with the Mediterranean Sea.

PYQs:

UPSC Prelims 2019 PYQ

Consider the following pairs:

Sea	Bordering Country
1. Adriatic Sea	Albania
2. Black Sea	Croatia
3. Caspian Sea	Kazakhstan
4. Mediterranean Sea	Morocco
5. Red Sea	Syria

Which of the pairs given above are correctly matched?

- A) 1, 2 and 4 only
- B) 1, 3 and 4 only
- C) 2 and 5 only
- D) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Answer: B) 1, 3 and 4 only

Why?

1. **Adriatic Sea — Albania:** Correct
2. **Black Sea — Croatia:** Incorrect. Croatia borders the Adriatic Sea, not the Black Sea.
3. **Caspian Sea — Kazakhstan:** Correct
4. **Mediterranean Sea — Morocco:** Correct
5. **Red Sea — Syria:** Incorrect. Syria borders the Mediterranean Sea, not the Red Sea.



UPSC Prelims 2022 PYQ: Senkaku Islands

Which one of the following statements best reflects the issue with Senkaku Islands, sometimes mentioned in the news?

- A) It is generally believed that they are artificial islands made by a country around South China Sea.
- B) China and Japan engage in maritime disputes over these islands in East China Sea.
- C) A permanent American military base has been set up there to help Taiwan to increase its defence capabilities.
- D) Though International Court of Justice declared them as no man's land, some South-East Asian countries claim them.

Answer: B) China and Japan engage in maritime disputes over these islands in East China Sea.

Exam takeaway:

Senkaku Islands are located in the **East China Sea** and are disputed between **Japan and China**. China calls them **Diaoyu Islands**.