

UPSC Exam Preparation: Battle of Diu

The Battle of Diu was fought between the Portuguese forces on one side and the combined forces of the Sultan of Gujarat, the Zamorin of Calicut, the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt and the Republic of Venice on 3 February 1509. The Portuguese had a decisive victory, and this battle changed the course of global maritime trade. Read more about this incident for the IAS exam

Background of the Battle of Diu

- The Battle of Diu was a naval battle fought between the naval fleets of the opposing sides. This marked the beginning of the European naval domination over the Asian seas.
- Vasco da Gama had arrived on the shores of Calicut in the Malabar Coast in May 1498. Since then, the Portuguese had been trying to gain control over the highly lucrative spice trade which was traditionally in the hands of the Arab and Muslim merchants of Malabar.
- The Portuguese tried to enter into a treaty with the Zamorin (Samoothiri ruler) of Calicut in a successive expedition, but in vain.
- The Portuguese allied with the Raja of Cochin, who was a vassal albeit a rebellious one of the Zamorin. There were frequent skirmishes between the Zamorin's men and the Portuguese and relations with the Zamorin were strained. The Portuguese realized that they could gain control over trade only through their naval strength.
- When the Zamorin attacked Cochin in response to the Cochin ruler's sway towards the foreign power, the Portuguese devastated Calicut in 1504.
- The Portuguese king then appointed Dom Francisco de Almeida as the viceroy of India in order to safeguard Portuguese interests and also to curb the Muslim merchants and ships.
- The Republic of Venice had interests in the spice trade and were supplying Europe with spices from the East. The Portuguese power play in the Indian Ocean was a threat to Venetian interests as well.
- The Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt were the main middlemen between Venice and the Arab merchants in the spice trade to Europe, so they were involved in this as well.
- The Mamluk Sultan, Al-Ashraf Qansuh al-Ghawri asked for Venetian support in exchange for a lowering of tariffs which would enable Venice to compete with the Portuguese. So, Venice supplied manned ships to the Mamluks.
- The Sultan of Gujarat also supported the campaign against the Portuguese. Malik Ayyaz was appointed the Governor of Diu by the Sultan.

Events during the Battle of Diu

- The Portuguese were attacked at Dabul first in the Battle of Dabul. At the end of the battle, Dabul was razed.

- In March 1508, a battle was fought at Chaul in which the Portuguese were defeated and Francisco de Almeida's son was killed.
- The battle of Diu was fought on 3rd February 1509. Even though the Portuguese were outnumbered, they had more cannons and gunners in comparison to the Mamluk-Gujarat-Calicut fleet, and had a resounding victory.
- Malik Ayyaz returned the Portuguese prisoners, who were treated well. But the Portuguese brutally killed all Indian and Mamluk prisoners. Francisco de Almeida was exacting revenge for his son's death.
- After the battle, the Portuguese did not take over Diu because they thought it would be expensive to maintain. They did take over Diu ultimately in 1537 and ruled over it until 1961 when the Indian government liberated it.
- Diu was ruled by the Portuguese for 424 years, which marks the longest rule of a colonial power in the world.