

KATCHATHEEVU ISLAND CONTROVERSY

Why in news?

Recently, the leader of the ruling political party attacked the main opposition party about its decision to “callously give away” the island of Katchatheevu.



Island of Katchatheevu

- **Geographical location**
 - Katchatheevu is an uninhabited area in the Palk Strait, between India and Sri Lanka.
 - It is no more than 1.6 km in length and slightly over 300 m wide at its broadest point.
 - It lies northeast of Rameswaram, about 33 km from the Indian coast.
 - It is about 62 km southwest of Jaffna, at the northern tip of Sri Lanka, and 24 km away from the inhabited Delft Island, belonging to Sri Lanka.
- **History**
 - Being the product of a 14-century volcanic eruption, Katchatheevu is relatively new in the geological timescale.
 - In the early mediaeval period, it was controlled by the Jaffna kingdom of Sri Lanka.
 - In the 17th century, control passed to the Ramnad zamindari based out of Ramanathapuram, about 55 km northwest of Rameswaram.
- **Dispute**
 - The Island became part of the Madras Presidency during the British Raj.
 - But in 1921, both India and Sri Lanka, at the time British colonies, claimed Katchatheevu in order to determine fishing boundaries.
 - A survey marked Katchatheevu in Sri Lanka, but a British delegation from India challenged this, citing ownership of the island by the Ramnad kingdom.
 - This dispute was not settled until 1974.

Agreement on Katchatheevu Island

- **Indo-Sri Lankan Maritime agreement of 1974**
 - In 1974, the then Indian govt under Indira Gandhi made attempts to settle the maritime border between India and Sri Lanka, once and for all.
 - As a part of this settlement, known as the '**Indo-Sri Lankan Maritime agreement**', Katchatheevu was ceded to Sri Lanka.
 - At the time, she thought the island had little strategic value and that ceasing India's claim over the island would deepen its ties with its southern neighbour.
- **1974 agreement and fishing rights of Indian fishermen**
 - As per the agreement, Indian fishermen were still allowed to access Katchatheevu.
 - Unfortunately, the issue of fishing rights was not ironed out by the agreement.
 - Sri Lanka interpreted Indian fishermen's right to access Katchatheevu to be limited to rest, drying nets and for visit to the Catholic shrine without visa.
- **1976 agreement**
 - Another agreement in 1976, during the period of Emergency in India, barred either country from fishing in the other's Exclusive Economic Zone.
 - Again, Katchatheevu lay right at the edge of the EEZs of either country, retaining a degree of uncertainty with regards to fishing rights.

Stand of the Union Government on the Issue

- The successive Union government's position on Katchatheevu has largely remained unchanged.
- It has argued that since the island had always been under dispute, no territory belonging to India was ceded nor sovereignty relinquished.

ATAL TUNNEL

The Manali-Leh highway was blocked due to fresh snowfall near the Atal Tunnel in Lahaul and Spiti districts recently.

About Atal Tunnel:



• Atal Tunnel, formerly known as **Rohtang Tunnel**, is the **world's longest high-altitude tunnel**, situated at an elevation of approximately **3,100 meters** (10,171 feet) above sea level.

- It is located in the **Pir Panjal Range** of the Himalayas, in **Himachal Pradesh**. It passes through **Rohtang pass**.
 - It stretches 9.02 km, **connecting Manali to Lahaul and Spiti Valley** throughout the year, previously cut off for about six months each year due to heavy snowfall.
 - The tunnel is a **horseshoe-shaped, single tube, double lane tunnel**. The tunnel features a **semi-transverse ventilation system**, emergency exits every 500 meters, evacuation lighting, broadcasting systems and fire hydrants for safety.
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WHAT IS AN ASTEROID?



NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory consistently forecasted the passage of four asteroids close to Earth.

- Asteroids, sometimes **called minor planets**, are **rocky remnants** left over from the early formation of our solar system about 4.6 billion years ago.
 - Most of this ancient space rubble can be **found orbiting the Sun** between **Mars and Jupiter** within the main asteroid belt.
 - Asteroids orbit the sun in highly flattened or "**elliptical**" **circles**, often rotating erratically, tumbling and falling through space.
 - The total mass of all the asteroids combined is less than that of Earth's Moon. **Many large asteroids have** one or more small **companion moons**. An example of this is Didymos, a half-mile (780 meters) wide asteroid that is orbited by the moonlet Dimorphos, which measures just 525 feet (160 m) across.
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WHAT IS CENTRAL ADMINISTRATIVE TRIBUNAL (CAT)?

The Allahabad High Court recently held that an appeal against an order of the CAT while exercising its contempt jurisdiction lies before the Supreme Court.



Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) had been established under **Article 323-A** of the Constitution.

Mandate: To adjudicate disputes and complaints with respect to the recruitment and conditions of service of persons appointed to public services and posts in connection with the affairs of the Union or other authorities under the control of the Government.

- In addition to the **Ministries and Departments of Central Government**, the Government has notified about 214 organizations under the jurisdiction of the CAT from time to time.
- **Composition:** A bench consists of one **Judicial Member** and one **Administrative Member**. There are 17 Benches and 21 Circuit Benches in the CAT all over India.
- The **conditions of service** of the Chairman and Members of CAT are the same as applicable to a Judge of High Court.
- **Salaries, Allowances and Conditions** of Service of the officers and other employees of the Tribunal are specified by the Central Government.

Powers:

- It exercises **jurisdiction only in relation to** the service matters of the parties covered by the **Administrative Tribunals Act 1985**.
- The Tribunal is **guided by the principles of natural justice** in deciding cases and is not bound by the procedure prescribed by the Civil Procedure Code.
- It is empowered to **frame its own rules of procedure** and practice.
- It has been conferred with the **power to exercise the same jurisdiction and authority in respect of contempt of itself as a High Court**.

INDIA'S TRADE RELIANCE ON CHINA AND EU RISING: UNCTAD

India's trade reliance on China and the European Union is rising as global trade is witnessing a marked shift along geopolitical lines, says a report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

About United nations Conference on Trade & Development (UNCTAD):

- UNCTAD is a permanent inter-governmental body established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1964.
- It is responsible for dealing with development issues, particularly international trade.
- Framing policies in various domains such as trade, technology, finance, aid, and transport are the most important priorities of UNCTAD.
- The Conference ordinarily meets once in four years.
 - The second UNCTAD Conference took place in New Delhi, India in 1968.
- Members: 195 countries
- Headquarters: Geneva, Switzerland

Objectives of UNCTAD:

- UNCTAD, with its work in the national and global levels, aims to help countries to:
 - Understand options to address macro-level development challenges.
 - Acquire beneficial integration into the international trading system.
 - Reduce the dependency on commodities by diversifying the economies.
 - Decrease their exposure to debt and financial volatility.
 - Increase development-friendliness by attracting more investments.
 - Increase technologies related to the digital domain.
 - Give more thrust to innovation and entrepreneurship.
 - Facilitate the flow of goods across borders.
 - Prevent consumer abuse.
 - Competition should not be stifled; hence any concerned regulations would be cross-checked.
 - Effectively utilize natural resources that would help in adapting to climate change.

Reports Published by UNCTAD:

- Trade and Development Report
- Trade and Environment Review
- World Investment Report
- Least Developed Countries Report

Highlights of the UNCTAD report with respect to India:

- The report has highlighted that India's trade reliance on China and the European Union is rising as global trade is witnessing a marked shift along geopolitical lines.
- It showed that **India's dependence on China and the European Union (EU) grew by 1.2 per cent while its reliance on Saudi Arabia slid by 0.6 per cent.**
 - This came despite India's efforts to cut reliance on China by implementing its flagship Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme and Quality Control Orders (QCOs) largely to limit entry of cheap Chinese products.
- UNCTAD's estimates showed a major shift in trade due to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war.
- While Russia's trade dependence on China surged by a record 7.1 per cent, its reliance on the EU slid by 5.3 per cent.
- This was largely a result of Russian oil shifting from the EU to China and India.
 - **The dependence of an economy on another is calculated as the ratio of their bilateral trade over the total trade of the dependent economy.**
 - Change is computed as a four-quarter average of this ratio relative to the same period in the previous year, the report said.

LALIT KALA AKADEMI



Recently, the Ministry of Culture has curtailed the powers of the Lalit Kala Akademi (LKA) Chairman, barring him from taking any “administrative actions”.

About Lalit Kala Akademi:

- It was inaugurated on 5th August 1954 by the then Minister for Education, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and was registered under the **Societies Registration Act 1860**.
- It has preserved and documented a permanent collection of the highest order that reflects the vitality, complexity and unfolding patterns of contemporary, modern, folk and tribal art in India. It is India's national academy of fine arts established by Government of India to promote and propagate understanding of Indian art, **in and outside the country**.
- It promotes Visual Art of India in various countries of the world through **Cultural Agreements and Cultural Exchange Programmes**.
- **Funding:** It is funded by the Ministry of culture.
- **Headquarter:** New Delhi. It has regional centres situated at Chennai, Lucknow, Kolkata, Bhubaneswar, Garhi.

CLEAN ENERGY TRANSITIONS PROGRAMME

Recently, the International Energy Agency (IEA) published the Clean Energy Transitions Programme annual report 2023.



About Clean Energy Transitions Programme:

- It is the IEA's **flagship initiative** launched in 2017 for accelerating progress toward a global net zero energy system.
- It leverages the insights and influence of the world's leading energy authority to accelerate **clean energy transitions**, particularly in emerging and developing economies
- Its goals are in line with the objectives of the 2015 Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals established by the United Nations.

Key facts about IEA:

- It is an autonomous **inter-governmental organisation** within the OECD framework. It works with governments and industry to shape a **secure and sustainable energy future** for all.

- It was founded in 1974 to ensure the security of oil supplies. It was created in response to the 1973-1974 oil crisis.
 - It consists of **31 member countries** and eleven association countries. A candidate country to the IEA must be a member country of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).
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HUME AI

Recently, a New York-based research lab and technology company Hume, has introduced what can be called the ‘first conversational AI with emotional intelligence’.



Hume AI is the world’s first **emotionally intelligent voice AI**. It accepts **live audio input** and returns both generated audio and transcripts augmented with measures of vocal expression.

- It is essentially an API that is powered by its proprietary **empathic large language model** (eLLM). This eLLM reportedly understands and emulates tones of voices and word emphasis to optimise human-AI conversations.
- It is trained on human reactions to optimize for positive expressions like happiness and satisfaction. EVI will continue to learn from users’ reactions.
- By processing the **tune, rhythm and timbre of speech**, EVI unlocks a variety of new capabilities, like knowing when to speak and generating more empathic language with the right tone of voice.

What is large language model?

- It is a type of **artificial intelligence** (AI) program that can recognize and generate text, among other tasks.
 - They are trained on huge sets of data—hence the name "large". They are built on machine learning: specifically, a type of neural network called a transformer model.
 - In simpler terms, an LLM is a computer program that has been fed enough examples to be able to recognize and interpret human language or other types of complex data.
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CARACAL

Recently, there was a concern regarding the conservation of the Caracal species.



Caracal is an elusive, primarily **nocturnal animal** which has traditionally been valued for its liveness and extraordinary ability to catch birds in flight. In India, it is called **siya gosh**, a Persian name that translates as ‘black Ear’.

- They typically use abandoned porcupine burrows and rock crevices for maternal dens, but can be found with their young in dense vegetation.

Distribution:

- The most suitable habitat for caracals in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh is located in Kutch, the Malwa Plateau, the Aravalli hill range and the Bundelkhand region,
- It is found in several dozen countries across **Africa, the Middle East, Central and South Asia.**

Habitat: They live in woodlands, savannahs and in scrub forests.

Threats: Large-scale hunting, illegal trading and loss of natural habitats are considered significant threats to the species.

Conservation status:

- **The Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972:** Schedule I