

7. Short News

1. Pilot Whales

Recently, a group of 29 pilot whales was found stranded on Twilight Beach (Paenga Rehia) near the northern tip of New Zealand's North Island. Over two dozen whales have died.

Possible Causes of Mass Strandings

Navigational Errors – Confusion caused by shallow, sloping coastlines affecting echolocation.

Social Bonding – Strong pod cohesion leads healthy whales to follow disoriented members.

Geomagnetic Disturbances – Changes in the Earth's magnetic field disorient migratory pods.

Predator Avoidance – Escape behaviour from killer whales pushes pods shoreward.

Anthropogenic Factors – Underwater noise, sonar, and ship traffic interfere with communication and navigation.

About Pilot Whales (*Globicephala macrorhynchus* / *G. melas*)

Recognition – Easily identified by their bulbous, rounded heads and curved dorsal fins.

Size – Adult males can reach up to 7 metres in length and weigh over 2 tonnes.

Social Structure – Form matrilineal groups of 20–100 members with strong family bonds.

Behaviour – Exhibit tight family cohesion, rarely separating from kin. Males remain in their maternal pods for life, making them highly social mammals.

Adaptations – Excellent deep divers—can dive up to 1,000 metres to hunt squid and small fish.

Habitat – Found in tropical and temperate deep-sea waters worldwide.

Diet – Primarily squid and small fish.

Conservation Status –

IUCN – Least Concern (but prone to local mass mortalities).

CITES – Listed in Appendix II (regulated trade).

2. Shaurya Van

Recently, the defence minister inaugurated Shaurya Van in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan

About Shaurya Van

Shaurya Van is a cacti-cum-botanical garden in Jaisalmer's Thar Desert, dedicated to honoring the valour and sacrifices of the Indian Armed Forces.

Key Features – Hosts a light-and-sound show commemorating the bravery of Indian soldiers. Situated at the 1971 Indo-Pak War Museum, linking history with tribute to the Armed Forces. Aims to educate visitors on military achievements and inspire patriotism.

Significance – Showcases the heroism and sacrifices of the Armed Forces. Reinforces public awareness and respect for military service. Enhances tourism and heritage education in the Jaisalmer region.

3. INS Vikrant

Prime Minister celebrated Diwali 2025 with Indian Navy personnel on INS Vikrant, also commemorating the success of Operation Sindoor off the Goa coast.

About INS Vikrant

Introduction – INS Vikrant is India's first home-built aircraft carrier, designed to enhance the country's naval power and strategic capabilities in the Indo-Pacific region.

History – Named after the first INS Vikrant (1961–1997), which played a key role in the 1971 India-Pakistan war. The first Vikrant was originally laid down in 1943 as HMS Hercules for the Royal Navy; construction was halted post-WWII.

Constructed by – Cochin Shipyard Ltd under the Ministry of Shipping.

Commissioned On – The carrier was commissioned in 2022 after over a decade of construction and operational preparation.

Features

Size – 262 metres long, 62 metres wide, 59 metres tall; hangar as big as two Olympic-size pools.

Capacity – Can carry 30 aircraft (MiG-29K jets, helicopters) and nearly 1,600 crew members.

Facilities – Equipped with a 16-bed hospital, 2,400 compartments, and fuel for 250 tankers.

Propulsion & Operations – Powered by four gas turbines (88 MW), top speed 28 knots, uses STOBAR ski-jump system for aircraft launch.

Significance – INS Vikrant strengthens India's naval self-reliance and maritime security, marking a milestone in indigenous defence manufacturing.

4. Rakchham-Chitkul Wildlife Sanctuary

Recently, an international bird-watching programme was held at Rakchham-Chitkul Wildlife Sanctuary, Himachal Pradesh.

About Rakchham-Chitkul Wildlife Sanctuary

Rakchham-Chitkul Wildlife Sanctuary is a protected area in Himachal Pradesh, known for its rich biodiversity and Himalayan landscapes.

Location – It is situated in Kinnaur district, covering 30.98 sq.km, at an elevation of 3,200–5,486 meters in the Western Himalayas.

Geographical Features – The sanctuary is surrounded by snow-capped mountains, lush valleys, and gushing rivers, with trekking routes such as the Lamkhanga Pass connecting Kinnaur to Gangotri, Uttarakhand. The region lies in a dry zone, unlike other Himachal sanctuaries, and does not experience monsoons.

Flora – The sanctuary hosts rhododendrons, oak trees, pine trees, and a variety of medicinal herbs.

Fauna – It is home to snow leopards, Himalayan black bears, musk deer, and numerous bird species.

Ecological Significance – The sanctuary plays a crucial role in conserving high-altitude Himalayan ecosystems, preserving endemic flora and fauna, and supporting sustainable ecotourism.

About International Bird-Watching Programme

The programme aimed to train local youth in birding and mountain climbing, provide information on biodiversity, and promote wildlife conservation awareness.

Participation – Delegates from 15 countries including Austria, Switzerland, Germany, Italy, Norway, and South Africa participated, observing more than 35 bird species. Birds observed included Plumbeous Water Redstart, Blue-fronted Redstart, Rock Bunting, Yellow-breasted Greenfinch, Pink-browed Rosefinch, and Red-headed Bullfinch.

5. Exercise Ocean Sky 2025

The Indian Air Force (IAF) is taking part in Ocean Sky 2025, to be hosted by the Spanish Air Force at Gando Air Base (Canary Islands).

About Ocean Sky 2025

It is a high-intensity multinational air combat drill aimed at enhancing interoperability, air combat proficiency, and mutual cooperation among participating nations.

Participants – Spain, India, USA, France, and several European allies.

Significance – This is the first time a non-NATO country is participating in this exercise highlighting growing India-Spain ties.