



**TATHASTU**  
Institute of Civil Services

# **DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS**



**24<sup>th</sup> December, 2023**

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S.NO.

TOPIC

1.	TRIBUNAL SYSTEM IN INDIA
2.	LATEST BLIP IN INDIA-MALDIVES TIES
3.	PRELIMS POINTERS

## TRIBUNALS SYSTEM IN INDIA

SOURCE: [THE HINDU](#)

### WHY IN NEWS?

- The news highlights a recent clarification by the **Supreme Court** regarding the limitations of tribunals in directing government policy.
 

*“Tribunals Cannot Direct Framing Of Policy By Government: Supreme Court”*
- Justices A.S. Oka and Sanjay Karol emphasized that tribunals, **operating within the confines of their governing legislation, lack the authority to mandate government policy decisions.**
- This clarification came during a case involving the **Armed Forces Tribunal (AFT)**, questioning whether it could **instruct the government to formulate a policy for the appointment of the Judge Advocate General (Air).**
- The court underscored that even though the **AFT possesses powers akin to a civil court, it does not have the authority equivalent to the Supreme Court or the High Courts.**
- The judgment emphasized that **not even High Courts, exercising their powers under Article 226 of the Constitution, can direct the government or a department to establish a specific policy.**

### TRIBUNAL SYSTEM IN INDIA:

- **Definition and Purpose of Tribunals:**
  - ✓ **Quasi-judicial Nature** and Independence from the Executive.
  - ✓ Resolution of **Administrative and Tax Disputes.**
  - ✓ Multifaceted Functions.



### Evolution of the Tribunal System:

- **Historical Context:**
  - ✓ Origin from 'Tribunes' in the **Roman Republic.**
  - ✓ Role of Magistrates in **Citizen Protection.**
  - ✓ Evolution of the Term in Modern Context.
  - ✓ **Constitutional Amendments (Articles 323A and 323B).**
  - ✓ Development of Tribunals **Over Eight Decades.**
  - ✓ Recent Reforms and Bill Introductions.

### Structure of the Indian Tribunal System:

- **Current Framework:**
  - ✓ **Dual Roles:** Substitutes and Subordinates to High Courts.
  - ✓ Reorganization and Consolidation (Finance Act, 2017).
  - ✓ **Ongoing Changes:** Bill of **2021 Abolishing Tribunals.**

### Functions of a Tribunal:

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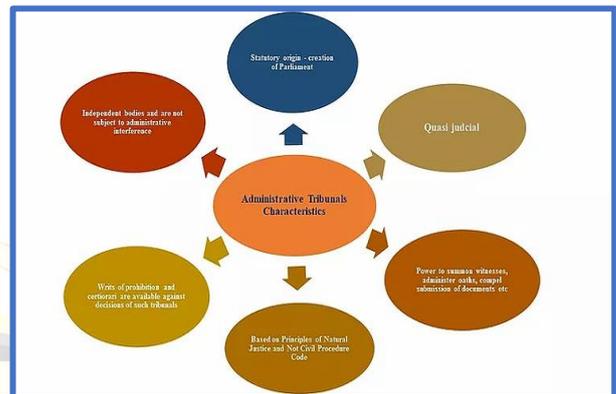


- **Versatile Responsibilities:**
  - ✓ **Adjudication of Disputes.**
  - ✓ Rights Determination between Parties.
  - ✓ **Administrative Decision-Making.**
  - ✓ Reviewing Existing Administrative Actions.

### CONSTITUTIONAL FOUNDATION AND COMPETENCE OF TRIBUNALS IN INDIA:

- **Constitutional Standing and Competence:**
  - ✓ Parliament can establish **alternatives to High Courts**, affirmed by the **Supreme Court in 1986**.
  - ✓ Tribunals can decide on constitutional validity, but they are **supplements to High Courts**, ruled in 1997.
  - ✓ High Courts can review **tribunal decisions on constitutional matters**.

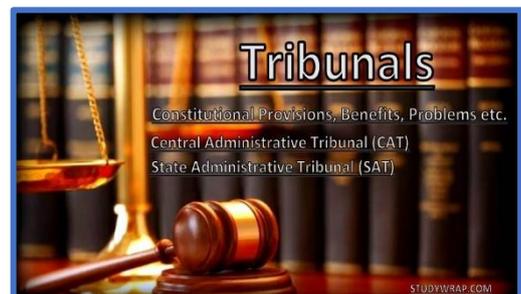
- **Independence of Tribunals:**
  - ✓ Noted **lack of complete tribunal independence** in 2010.
  - ✓ Emphasized tribunal freedom from **executive interference in 2014**.
  - ✓ **Independence components:** Selection process, **tribunal composition**, and terms of office.



- **Selection Process of Members:**
  - ✓ **Judicial insulation** from executive **interference is crucial (1986)**.
  - ✓ **Lack of judicial dominance in selection committees** violates separation of powers (2019).
  - ✓ 2020 ruling specified selection committees, including **Chief Justice, presiding officer, and ministry representatives**.
- **Composition of Tribunals:**
  - ✓ Members from various fields or **central government departments**.
  - ✓ Vital **presence of technical members** with judicial members.
  - ✓ No need for technical members if jurisdiction transfers to tribunals.
  - ✓ Technical members' inclusion could undermine judicial independence.
- **Term of Office:**
  - ✓ **Short tenure with re-appointment provisions** increases executive influence (2019).
  - ✓ Recommended **five-year term with a maximum age limit (2020)**.

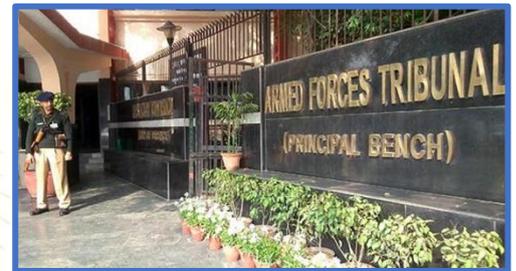
### DIFFERENT TRIBUNALS IN INDIA:

- **Administrative Tribunals:**
  - ✓ Established under the **Administrative Tribunals Act, 1985**, based on **Article 323A of the Constitution**.
  - ✓ Adjudicates disputes related to recruitment and conditions of service in public services of the Union and States.
  - ✓ **Types:**
    - **Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT)** for Central Government employees.
    - **State Administrative Tribunal** for State employees.
    - **Joint Administrative Tribunal (JAT)** for two or more States.





- ✓ **Other tribunals for administrative and tax-related disputes:**
  - *Income Tax Appellate Tribunal (ITAT), Customs, Excise and Service Tax Appellate Tribunal (CESTAT), National Green Tribunal (NGT), Competition Appellate Tribunal (COMPAT), Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT), etc.*
- **Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT):**
  - ✓ Established on **November 1, 1985**.
  - ✓ **Jurisdiction:** Central Government employees, Union Territory employees, and local or other governments under the Government of India.
  - ✓ **17 regular benches, 15 at principal High Court seats**, and two at Jaipur and Lucknow.
  - ✓ Members from judicial and administrative backgrounds.
- **State Administrative Tribunal:**
  - ✓ **Empowered by Article 323B** of the Constitution.
  - ✓ Set up by state legislatures for matters like tax-related issues.
- **Water Disputes Tribunal:**
  - ✓ Enacted under the **Inter-State River Water Disputes (ISRWD) Act, 1956**.
  - ✓ Adjudicates disputes on waters of **inter-State rivers and their valleys**.
  - ✓ **Inter-State River Water Disputes (Amendment) Bill, 2019** aims for a standalone Tribunal, streamlining the dispute resolution process.
- **Armed Forces Tribunal (AFT):**
  - ✓ Established under the **Armed Forces Tribunal Act, 2007**.
  - ✓ Adjudicates disputes on commission, appointments, and conditions of service for personnel under **Army Act, 1950; Navy Act, 1957; and Air Force Act, 1950**.
  - ✓ Principal Bench in New Delhi, with Regional Benches in various cities.
- **National Green Tribunal (NGT):**
  - ✓ Formed under the **National Green Tribunal Act, 2010**.
  - ✓ **Specialized quasi-judicial body** for environmental cases.
  - ✓ Comprises judges and environment experts for expeditious case disposal.
  - ✓ **Principal Place of Sitting: New Delhi**, with additional sittings in **Bhopal, Pune, Kolkata, and Chennai**.
  - ✓ Mandated to dispose of applications or appeals **within 6 months**.
- **Income Tax Appellate Tribunal (ITAT):**
  - ✓ Constituted **under Section 252 of the Income Tax Act, 1961**.
  - ✓ Consists of Judicial and Accountant Members.
  - ✓ Exercises powers conferred **by the Income Tax Act**.



## SUPREME COURT'S RECENT PRONOUNCEMENT ON TRIBUNAL POWERS:

- **Decision:**
  - ✓ This clarification arose during the examination of whether the **Armed Forces Tribunal (AFT)** could **direct the government** to create a policy for **filling the post of the Judge Advocate General (Air)**.
- **Quasi-Judicial Limitations:**



- ✓ The Court, comprising **Justices A.S. Oka and Sanjay Karol**, emphasized that tribunals, including the AFT, **function as quasi-judicial bodies**, operating within the defined parameters established by governing legislation.
- ✓ It explicitly stated that these **tribunals lack the power to mandate specific policy** formulations by government authorities.
- **Comparison with High Courts:**
  - ✓ **Drawing parallels**, the judgment highlighted that even High Courts, in the **exercise of powers under Article 226 of the Constitution**, cannot direct the government or a department to formulate a particular policy.
  - ✓ This **underscores a consistent legal principle that courts**, whether tribunals or **higher judiciary**, cannot **compel legislative** or policy-making actions by the government.
- **Sole Prerogative of Government:**
  - ✓ The Supreme Court underscored that the creation or sanctioning of schemes or policies related to the **service of defense personnel rests as the "sole prerogative of the government."**
  - ✓ This **reinforces the government's exclusive authority** in determining policies pertaining to defense personnel.
- **Writ Jurisdiction and Fundamental Rights:**
  - ✓ The judgment noted that **even a court with writ jurisdiction**, faced with situations **conflicting with fundamental rights**, does not possess the power to direct the formation of policies.
  - ✓ This underscores the **judiciary's limitations in compelling policy decisions** even in the face of **alleged violations of fundamental rights**.



#### KEY ISSUES IN TRIBUNAL FUNCTIONING:

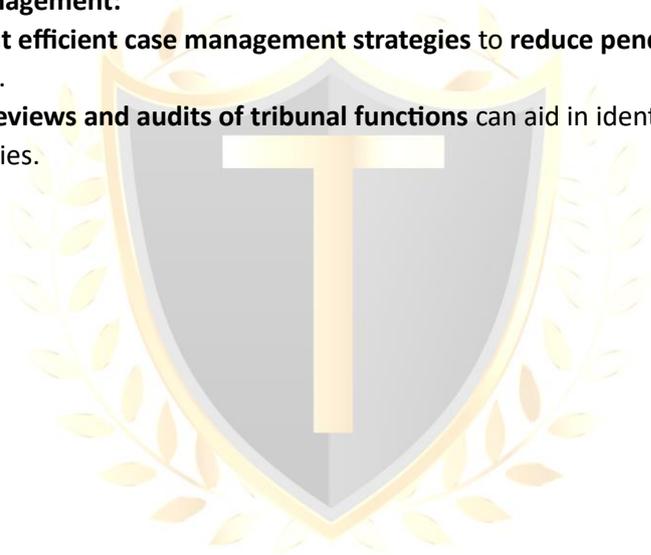
- **Challenges:**
  - ✓ **Lack of autonomy in the appointment** and funding of tribunals.
  - ✓ In the case of **L. Chandra Kumar vs. Union of India & Ors. (1997)**, the Supreme Court held that **appeals against orders of a tribunal could be made in the High Court**, defeating the purpose of reducing the burden of the normal courts.
- **Pendency of Cases:**
  - ✓ Tribunals, designed to **expedite case disposal**, face substantial backlogs, impacting their effectiveness.
  - ✓ Examples include the **central government industrial tribunal, Armed Forces Tribunal, and Income-tax Appellate Tribunal**.
- **Tribunal Abolition and Impact:**
  - ✓ The **Tribunals Reforms (Rationalisation and Conditions of Service) Ordinance, 2021** abolished nine tribunals, potentially increasing workload in High Courts.
  - ✓ Concerns raised about the impact on pending cases and efficiency.
- **Human Resource Challenges:**
  - ✓ Insufficient human resources, including a **shortage of judges**, contribute to case pendency.
  - ✓ Vacancies in crucial tribunals, **such as the Armed Forces Tribunal**, hinder their functionality.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BETTER TRIBUNAL FUNCTIONS:

- **Administration of Tribunals:**
  - ✓ **1997:** Recommended an **independent mechanism** for uniform tribunal management.



- ✓ **2014:** Administrative support from **Ministry of Law and Justice**; no facilities from parent ministries.
- ✓ **2020:** Supreme Court **reiterated NTC importance**.
- **National Tribunals Commission (NTC):**
  - ✓ Establish a dedicated, independent NTC to provide essential resources—infrastructural, financial, and human—**for effective tribunal functioning**.
  - ✓ Address vacancies in tribunals to **enhance their operational capacity**.
- **Judicial Impact Assessment:**
  - ✓ Conduct a **judicial impact assessment** to ascertain the additional resources required to handle new cases resulting from the enactment of new laws.
  - ✓ The Supreme Court's recommendation for a **thorough analysis during the amalgamation of tribunals should be heeded**.
- **Transparency and Reporting:**
  - ✓ Release reports on judicial **impact assessments related to the amalgamation of tribunals**, ensuring transparency and accountability.
  - ✓ **Regularly update the status of vacancies in tribunals** to enable prompt corrective actions.
- **Efficient Case Management:**
  - ✓ **Implement efficient case management strategies to reduce pendency** and ensure timely resolution.
  - ✓ **Periodic reviews and audits of tribunal functions** can aid in identifying and rectifying inefficiencies.





## LATEST BLIP IN INDIA-MALDIVES TIES

SOURCE: [THE HINDU](#)

### WHY IN NEWS?

- The decision by the **Maldives Cabinet not to renew the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with India for hydrography cooperation** is significant in the context of **evolving diplomatic relations** between the two countries.
- The move comes shortly after **President Mohamed Muizzu's pledge to send back Indian troops** and reflects a **shift from the previous administration's 'India first' policy**.
- The termination of the hydrographic agreement raises questions **about the future trajectory of India-Maldives ties, impacting regional dynamics and India's influence in the Indian Ocean region**.

### MALDIVES-INDIA HYDROGRAPHY COOPERATION:

- **Understanding Hydrography:**
  - ✓ Hydrography is the **scientific discipline dedicated to the study of oceans, seas, and various water bodies**.
  - ✓ Involves **compiling and analysing data**, maps, and charts to understand the **physical attributes of water bodies**.
  - ✓ Primarily undertaken for **ensuring safety in navigation**.
  - ✓ Supports economic development, contributes to **security and defense measures**, aids in scientific research, and facilitates environmental protection.
  - ✓ Hydrographical assessments **encompass tidal patterns, current movements, and wave information**.
- **Origins of Agreement:**
  - ✓ **Signed on June 8, 2019**, during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the Maldives.
  - ✓ Focused on collaboration in hydrography, **involving the study of Maldivian territorial waters**.
- **Hydrographic Survey by India:**
  - ✓ Agreement involved India conducting hydrographic surveys of Maldivian waters.
  - ✓ Studies encompassed **reefs, lagoons, coastlines, and ocean currents and tide levels**.

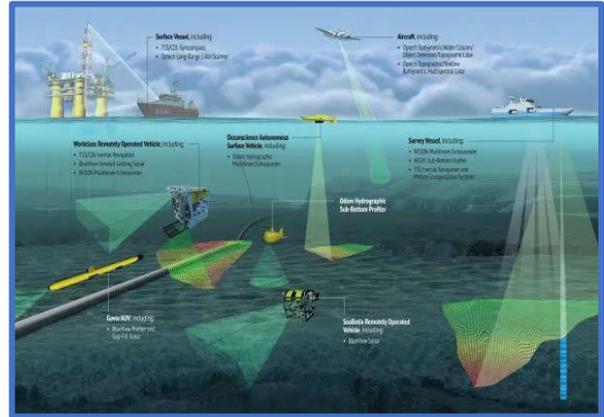


### INDIA'S HYDROGRAPHIC EXPERTISE:

- **International Collaboration:**
  - ✓ India, an **IHO member since 1955**, actively contributes to **international hydrography standards**.
  - ✓ Collaborates with countries in the **Indian Ocean Region, Africa, and East Asia** for hydrographic initiatives.
- **Indian Naval Hydrographic Department (INHD):**
  - ✓ **Established in 1874 in Kolkata**, the INHD serves as the **central agency** for hydrographic surveys in India.
  - ✓ Operates a fleet of modern survey ships equipped for comprehensive hydrographic studies.
- **Global Partnerships:**
  - ✓ Engages with countries like **Mauritius, Seychelles, Tanzania, Maldives, Mozambique, Vietnam, Myanmar, Kenya, and Sri Lanka**.



- ✓ Supports these nations in developing their hydrographic capabilities.
- **Maritime Diplomacy and Force Multiplier:**
  - ✓ Recognized for leveraging hydrography as a "force multiplier" in maritime diplomacy.
  - ✓ Acknowledged by the INHD for contributing to global hydrographic advancements.
- **Training and Capacity Building:**
  - ✓ The National Institute of Hydrography, under the INHD, provides training.
  - ✓ Personnel from 39 countries have undergone hydrographic training, showcasing India's commitment to capacity building.



**SIGNIFICANCE OF 2019 MOU:**

- **Strategic Timing:**
  - ✓ Signed during PM Modi's state visit to the **Maldives in June 2019**.
  - ✓ Occurred amid **President Solih's victory** and growing ties between the nations.
- **Political Commitment:**
  - ✓ Resulted from a **joint commitment by leaders for close cooperation** in development, **defence, and maritime security**.
  - ✓ Demonstrated collaboration between India and the Maldives post-election.
- **Landmark Joint Commission Meeting:**
  - ✓ Marked the **initiation of the Joint Commission on Hydrography**.
  - ✓ First meeting held in the **Maldives in September 2019**, highlighting the priority given to hydrographic cooperation.
- **Operational Implementation:**
  - ✓ Led to practical collaboration between MNDF and the Indian Navy.
  - ✓ **Three joint hydrographic surveys conducted in 2021, 2022, and 2023** showcased the operationalization of the agreement.
- **Bilateral Defence Engagement:**
  - ✓ **Strengthened the defence ties** between both nations.
  - ✓ **MNDF and Indian Navy's joint surveys** emphasized the collaborative approach in ensuring maritime security.
- **Continuity in Collaboration:**
  - ✓ **Set the stage for ongoing hydrographic cooperation**.
  - ✓ Laid the foundation for **sustained engagement in the maritime domain**.



**Decision Against Agreement Renewal:**

- **National Security Concerns:**
  - ✓ Cabinet decision aligned with the **administration's commitment to terminate agreements** deemed detrimental to Maldives' national security.
  - ✓ Emphasizes the **importance of safeguarding sovereignty**.
- **Capacity Building Within Military:**
  - ✓ Decision driven by the **intent to enhance the Maldivian military's capability**.



- ✓ Aims to **entrust them with responsibilities for surveillance** and policing of waters, reducing reliance on foreign participation.
- **Exclusion of Foreign Involvement:**
  - ✓ Focus on excluding **foreign parties from critical endeavours**.
  - ✓ A strategic move to ensure complete control over **sensitive information related to national security**.
- **Implementation of Election Pledges:**
  - ✓ Reflects President Muizzu's commitment to fulfil election promises.
  - ✓ Part of a broader agenda, including the **removal of Indian troops, aligning with the 'India Out' campaign**.
- **Sovereignty Restoration:**
  - ✓ Decision resonates with the **pledge to restore Maldives' sovereignty**.
  - ✓ Highlights the government's determination to reclaim control over crucial aspects of national interest.
- **Core Demand Acknowledged:**
  - ✓ **Acknowledgment of the core demand from the 'India Out' campaign** in President Muizzu's initial official announcements.
  - ✓ Demonstrates a proactive approach to address **public sentiments and campaign promises**.

## WAY FORWARD IN INDIA- MALDIVES RELATIONS:

- **India's Response to Cabinet Decision:**
  - ✓ Ministry of External Affairs highlights **India's established track record in hydrography**.
  - ✓ Emphasizes India's successful cooperation with various nations in the Indian Ocean region.
- **Visible Benefits to Partner Countries:**
  - ✓ Spokesperson Arindam Bagchi underscores **the tangible advantages experienced by partner countries through collaboration with India in hydrography**.

## Implications for India-Maldives Ties:

- **Challenging Phase Ahead:**
  - ✓ Recent developments suggest a **forthcoming challenging phase in the India-Maldives partnership**.
  - ✓ The decision to **skip the Colombo Security Conclave's NSA-level meet** signals potential strains in maritime security collaboration.
- **Missed Conclave Meeting:**
  - ✓ **Maldives' absence from the Conclave's** recent meeting coincides with critical decisions regarding the hydrographic agreement.
  - ✓ Raises questions about the **continuity of joint efforts in maritime security among member countries**.
- **Shift in Alliances:**

**10 REASONS WHY MALDIVES IS IMPORTANT FOR INDIA**

- 1 Strategically located in the Indian Ocean, Maldives archipelago comprising 1200 coral islands lies next to key shipping lanes which ensure uninterrupted energy supplies to countries like China, Japan and India.
- 2 Since China started to send naval ships to Indian Ocean roughly 10 years ago – and right up to Gulf of Aden for anti-piracy operations – Maldives' significance has steadily grown and now its at the heart of international geopolitics.
- 3 As the pre-eminent South Asian power and a 'net security provider' in the Indian Ocean region, India needs to cooperate with Maldives in security and defence sectors.
- 4 China's massive economic presence in Maldives is a major concern for India. With the country now said to owe 70% of its external aid to China, India had to push back. The current political crisis might just have offered India the right opportunity.
- 5 A large section of population which supports the opposition parties like Nasheed's MDP wants India to act against Yameen.
- 6 Maldives is also a member of SAARC. It is important for India to have Maldives on board to maintain its leadership in the region. Maldives was the only SAARC country which seemed reluctant to follow India's call for boycott of SAARC summit in Pakistan after the Uri attack.
- 7 Under Yameen, radicalization grew rapidly and it was often said that the archipelago accounted for one of the highest numbers of foreign fighters in Syria in terms of per capita. India can ill-afford a neighbor which fails to check Islamic radicalization.
- 8 India and Maldives share ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious and commercial links. India was among the first to recognize Maldives after its independence in 1965 and later established its mission at Male in 1972.
- 9 There are 25,000 Indian nationals living in Maldives (second largest expatriate community). Indian tourists also account for close to 6% of tourists Maldives receives every year.
- 10 India is also preferred destination for Maldivians for education, medical treatment, recreation and business. According to MEA, more and more Maldivians are seeking long term visa for pursuing higher studies/medical treatment in India.



- ✓ Vice-President Latheef's visit to China, expressing **eagerness for collaboration, hints at potential shifts in diplomatic alliances.**
- ✓ Points to the Maldives exploring **alternative avenues for cooperation beyond the traditional partnerships.**
- **MEA's Stance on Expertise Benefits:**
  - ✓ Ministry of External Affairs underscores the **belief that neighboring countries should leverage the benefits of India's hydrographic expertise.**
  - ✓ Suggests that India sees itself as a **valuable resource for regional nations.**
- **Navigating Choppy Waters:**
  - ✓ The termination of the hydrographic initiative necessitates **careful navigation of diplomatic relations.**
  - ✓ India faces the challenge **of maintaining ties amid evolving dynamics in the Indian Ocean region.**





## PRELIMS POINTERS:

TOPIC	DISCRIPTION
<b>Reindeer (Rangifer tarandus)</b>	<p><b>WHY IN NEWS?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ <i>Researchers discover a <b>link between reindeer's rumination and non-REM sleep.</b></i></li><li>❖ <i>More time spent ruminating correlates <b>with less time in non-REM sleep.</b></i></li><li>❖ <i>EEG recordings show brainwave <b>similarities between rumination and non-REM sleep.</b></i></li><li>❖ <i>Suggests that reindeer are more "<b>rested</b>" after engaging in rumination.</i></li></ul> <p><b>ABOUT REINDEER (RANGIFER TARANDUS)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ <b>Habitat and Distribution:</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>☛ Found in the <b>Arctic tundra and boreal forests of Greenland, Scandinavia, Russia, Alaska, and Canada.</b></li><li>☛ Domesticated in Europe, with two ecotypes: <b>tundra reindeer and forest reindeer.</b></li><li>☛ In India, the largest number of reindeer can be <b>found in the Ranganthittu Bird Sanctuary</b>, which is located in the <b>Indian state of Karnataka.</b></li></ul></li><li>❖ <b>Physical Characteristics:</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>☛ <b>Large males stand over 1.2 meters tall, weighing more than 250 kg; females are slightly smaller.</b></li><li>☛ Distinctive cloven hoofs for <b>traversing snow, good swimmers.</b></li><li>☛ <b>Coat color varies</b> from whitish in winter to brown in summer.</li><li>☛ Both males and females possess antlers, with males having up to 44 points and <b>antlers growing up to 1.4 meters.</b></li></ul></li><li>❖ <b>Life Cycle and Behaviour:</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>☛ Reindeer mature as yearlings, with males competing for females from their fourth autumn.</li><li>☛ Rut occurs in October, <b>lasting only 11 days.</b></li><li>☛ Single calf born in May or June after a gestation period of seven and a half months.</li></ul></li><li>❖ <b>Seasonal Movement and Diet:</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>☛ Tundra reindeer <b>migrate extensively, covering up to 5,000 km</b> in an annual cycle.</li><li>☛ Forest reindeer live in <b>smaller family groups with less migration.</b></li><li>☛ Seasonal diets include <b>grass, sedges, leaves, and lichens during winter.</b></li><li>☛ <b>Metabolism slows in winter</b>, relying on lichens, specifically reindeer moss.</li><li>☛ Recycling urea helps them survive on a <b>low-protein winter diet.</b></li></ul></li></ul>





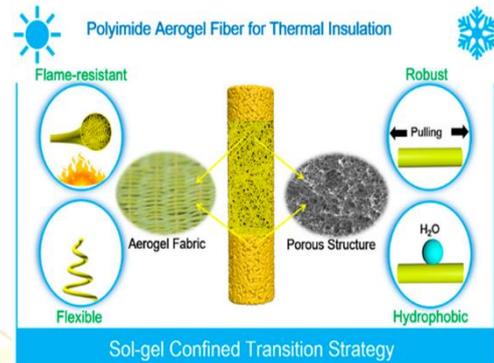
## Innovative Aerogel Fiber: Crafting Future Textiles

### WHY IN NEWS?

- ❖ Inspired by the **structure of polar bear fur**, researchers **present a knittable aerogel fibre with exceptional thermal and mechanical properties.**
- ❖ The fibres are **washable, dyeable, durable, and well-suited to be used in advanced textiles**

### AEROGEL FIBER CHARACTERISTICS

- ❖ **Thermal and Mechanical Excellence:**
  - ☛ Researchers introduce **knittable aerogel fiber with remarkable thermal and mechanical properties.**
  - ☛ Exhibits exceptional thermal insulation and mechanical robustness, making it **ideal for various applications.**
- ❖ **Textile Suitability:**
  - ☛ Fibers are **washable, dyeable, and durable, ensuring practicality in textile applications.**
  - ☛ Suited for **advanced textiles, opening possibilities for diverse applications.**



### PRACTICAL APPLICATION

- ❖ **Sweater Test:**
  - ☛ Researchers test the aerogel fibers in a sweater, showcasing **impressive thermal insulation.**
  - ☛ Proves the adaptability of the fibers for real-world use in clothing and textiles.

### ADVANTAGES OF ENCAPSULATED AEROGEL FIBER

- ❖ **Thermal Insulation:**
  - ☛ Aerogel fiber, **when encapsulated, provides outstanding thermal insulation.**
  - ☛ Addresses the **need for efficient insulation** in various industries.
  - ☛ Despite its **lightweight nature**, encapsulated aerogel fiber exhibits **mechanical robustness.**
  - ☛ Offers a **combination of thermal efficiency** and structural strength.

### FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

- ❖ **Textile Innovation:**
  - ☛ Paves the way for the development of **advanced textiles with enhanced thermal properties.**
  - ☛ Promises innovations in **clothing, ensuring comfort and insulation.**
- ❖ **Versatile Applications:**
  - ☛ Potential applications **extend beyond clothing to diverse industries** requiring thermal insulation.
  - ☛ Marks a significant step in the **evolution of materials for various practical uses.**



## Places in news- Bab el-Mandeb

### WHY IN NEWS?

- ❖ *Houthis, a Shia militia in Yemen, declared war against Israel in solidarity with Palestinians.*
- ❖ *Fired drones and ballistic missiles towards Israel, targeting ships in the Red Sea.*
- ❖ *Houthis, backed by Iran, shifted from targeting Israel to attacking commercial ships.*
- ❖ *Initially focused on Israel-flagged ships but later expanded to all vessels.*

### STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF BAB EL-MANDEB

#### ❖ Geographical Location:

- ☛ 29-km wide strait strategically crucial, connecting **the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean.**
- ☛ Separates the **Arabian Peninsula from East Africa.**
- ☛ It connecting the **Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean** via the Red Sea and the Suez Canal.
- ☛ It is one **of the world's most important seaborne commodity shipping routes**, primarily for **crude oil and petroleum.**

#### ❖ Bordering Countries:

- ☛ **Yemen and Saudi Arabia** share an eastern **border with the Red Sea.**
- ☛ **Egypt** borders the Red Sea to the **north and west.**
- ☛ **Sudan, Eritrea, and Djibouti** form the western **border of the Red Sea.**



### RECENT CONCERNS OVER THIS REGION

#### ❖ Global Shipping Threat:

- ☛ Targeting vessels passing through the **Strait of Bab el-Mandeb.**
- ☛ **37 incidents involving tankers reported from November 19 to December 18.**
- ☛ **Forced top shipping companies (Maersk, Hapag-Lloyd, MSC) to suspend Red Sea routes.**
- ☛ Traffic through the Red Sea **dropped by 35%**, increasing shipping and insurance costs.

## Air India's first Airbus A350 aircraft

### WHY IN NEWS?

- ❖ *Tata group-owned Air India welcomes its first Airbus A350-900 aircraft.*
- ❖ *Becomes the first Indian airline to include the A350 in its fleet.*
- ❖ *Marks the initial delivery from Air India's 250-aircraft order with Airbus.*

### AIRBUS A350-900 AIRCRAFT FEATURES

#### ❖ Aircraft Features:

- ☛ A350-900 configured with **316 seats in a three-class cabin.**
- ☛ **Business Class:** 28 private suites with full-flat beds.
- ☛ **Premium Economy:** 24 seats with extra legroom.
- ☛ **Economy Class:** 264 spacious seats.



- Equipped with **Panasonic eX3 in-flight** entertainment system and HD screens.

**AIRCRAFT ORDER DETAILS**

- Air India's Airbus order **comprises 40 A350 planes**, split into **20 A350-900 and 20 A350-1000 variants**.
- Additionally, the **order includes 210 planes** of the **A320neo family of narrowbody aircraft**.



**AIR INDIA WELCOMES ITS FIRST AIRBUS A350-900**

**OPERATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE**

- Signifies Air India's role in **rejuvenating Indian aviation** by introducing the first new widebody fleet type in over a decade.
- Continues Air India's legacy as **the first Indian airline to operate the Boeing 787 Dreamliner in 2012**.
- Air India aims for an extensive expansion, with **plans outlined in the five-year roadmap Vihaan.AI**.
- Focus on **improving product offerings and refurbishing existing planes**.

**STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE**

- Shift in the dominance of **widebody planes in India**, traditionally led by Boeing.
- A350-900's range and capacity** suitable for **long-haul and international flights**.

**Prime Meridian**

**WHY IN NEWS?**

- Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has asserted that **Ujjain, India, set the world's time 300 years ago**, predating the shift of the Prime Meridian to Paris and then Greenwich.
- This claim prompts a **closer look at historical and astronomical contexts**.

**UNDERSTANDING PRIME MERIDIAN AND INTERNATIONAL DATE LINE**

**Prime Meridian:**

- Chosen in 1984**, it passes through the **Royal Astronomical Observatory at Greenwich, London**.
- Divides the globe into Eastern and Western Hemispheres.
- Reference point for numbering longitude, extending eastwards and westwards.
- prime meridian passes through **Europe, Africa, and Antarctica**.





- **UK, France and Spain in Europe and Algeria, Mali, Burkina, Faso, Tongo and Ghana in Africa** are the countries which passes through Prime Meridian
- ❖ **Role of Prime Meridian:**
  - Travel **eastwards gains time** until the **180-degree meridian**.
  - Travel **westwards loses 12 hours** at the **180-degree west meridian**.
  - **International Date Line is situated at the 180-degree meridian**.
- ❖ **International Date Line Details:**
  - **Separates days and dates**.
  - Deviates in the **mid-Pacific to prevent confusion**.
  - Crossing **eastwards gains a day, westwards loses a day**.
- ❖ **Indian Standard Time (IST):**
  - Adopted meridian: **82.5 degrees east**.
  - IST is **5 hours 30 minutes ahead of Greenwich Mean Time**.

#### CLAIM ABOUT UJJAIN

- ❖ **Historical significance:**
  - Ujjain set the **world's time 300 years ago**.
  - Ujjain's historical significance in **Indian astronomy from the 4th century CE**.
  - **Surya Siddhanta treatise suggested a Prime Meridian passing through Ujjain**.
  - In 1719, an **observatory was built in Ujjain by Sawai Raja Jai Singh**.
- ❖ **Verification and Basis:**
  - Ujjain's role in Indian astronomical traditions acknowledged, but no globally recognized **Prime Meridian existed 300 years ago**.
  - Surya Siddhanta's mention of a **meridian doesn't align with modern concepts**.
- ❖ **Shift to Global Time Standardization:**
  - 19th-century global interconnectedness **demanded uniform time**.
  - National prime meridians initially established for synchronization and colonial governance.
  - Attempts for a global prime meridian led to the **1884 International Meridian Conference adopting Greenwich as the standard**.

