



Daily Current Affairs



To The Point

by Dhananjay Gautam

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1 Chios Island: Greece's Enchanting Gem of the Aegean

Context: A massive wildfire recently broke out near the main town of **Chios Island**, prompting an urgent response from **over 100 firefighters**. They were supported by **water-dropping helicopters and firefighting aircraft** as they battled to contain the flames. The fire threatened not only the island's natural beauty but also its historic villages and important agricultural areas.



Discovering Chios: Greece's Mastic Treasure

Located in the **eastern Aegean Sea**, just **8 kilometers off the western coast of Turkey**, Chios is the **fifth-largest Greek island**, covering an area of **842.29 square kilometers**. It stretches about **50 km in length** and ranges from **13 to 24 km in width**, making it a substantial and diverse island in terms of geography and culture.

Geography and Natural Beauty:

The island is dominated by a **north-south mountain range**, with its highest point being **Mount Pelinaion**, standing at **1,297 meters**. Chios is admired for its **lush greenery**, **crystal-clear beaches**, and **well-preserved medieval villages**, some of which date back to the **Byzantine era**.

Chios Town: The Island's Beating Heart

The capital, **Chios Town**, is the administrative and cultural hub of the island. It's a blend of **modern life and ancient charm**, offering everything from **historic mansions** to **vibrant marketplaces** and **museums**. It also serves as a gateway to explore the rest of the island's treasures.

The Mastic Island:

- Chios is famously known as "**The Mastic Island**", thanks to its **exclusive production of mastic gum** — a resin harvested from the **mastic tree**, which only grows naturally in the **southern part of Chios**. This **unique product**, used in foods, cosmetics, and medicine, has earned the island a **UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage** recognition.

A Legacy of Culture and History:

- Chios boasts a **rich historical lineage**, with evidence of settlement going back to the **Neolithic Age**. It is often cited as the **birthplace of Homer**, the legendary author of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. The island has also produced many **Greek writers, philosophers, and politicians** over the centuries.

You can still admire **well-preserved Byzantine churches**, **medieval fortresses**, and **mansion-lined villages** that whisper tales of a powerful past. Villages like **Mesta**, **Pyrgi**, and **Olympoi** are known for their **distinctive architecture** and **historical resilience**.

Did You Know?

- Chios was once a **major naval power** in the Aegean during classical antiquity.
- The island played a significant role during the **Greek War of Independence**, and the **Chios Massacre of 1822** left a profound impact on European consciousness, inspiring artists like **Eugène Delacroix**.



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- Mastic from Chios has been used since **ancient Greek and Roman times** and was even considered a **royal delicacy** in Byzantine and Ottoman courts.

Conclusion:

Whether for its **natural splendor**, **historical depth**, or **unique cultural identity**, **Chios Island** remains one of the most **captivating destinations in Greece**. Despite facing challenges like the recent wildfire, its spirit endures — rooted deeply in the past and blossoming into a vibrant future.



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2 Tomahawk Cruise Missile: America's Precision Weapon in Modern Warfare

Context: In a major escalation of the ongoing **Iran-Israel conflict**, the **United States** has intervened militarily by launching a series of **precision strikes** on **Iranian nuclear infrastructure**. These attacks were carried out using **Tomahawk cruise missiles** alongside **GBU-57 "bunker buster" bombs**, targeting fortified sites across **Tehran**. The move marks a significant shift in U.S. involvement in the Middle East crisis.



Overview: What Is the Tomahawk Missile?

The **Tomahawk missile** is a **long-range, subsonic cruise missile** developed by the **U.S. Navy**. Designed for **precision strikes** against land-based targets, it can be launched from both **surface ships** and **submarines** using **Vertical Launch Systems (VLS)**. With its proven accuracy and adaptability, the Tomahawk remains a critical asset in the U.S. arsenal.

Combat History and Global Use:

First used in combat during **Operation Desert Storm in 1991**, Tomahawk missiles have played a key role in numerous U.S. military operations, including:

- **Kosovo (1999)**
- **Iraq War (2003)**
- **Libya (2011)**
- **Syria (2017 and 2018)**

Their ability to strike targets with surgical precision has made them the **weapon of choice** in high-stakes missions.

Key Features and Advanced Capabilities:

- **Stealth and Low-Altitude Flight:** Tomahawks fly at **low altitudes**, allowing them to **evade radar detection** and **anti-aircraft defenses**.
- **Precision Navigation:** They are guided by a combination of **GPS**, **inertial navigation systems**, and **terrain contour mapping**, achieving **accuracy within 10 meters**.
- **Complex Flight Paths:** Capable of following **non-linear, pre-programmed routes**, making interception highly difficult.
- **Long Reach:** Depending on the variant, the missile can strike targets between **1,000 and 1,500 miles** (about **1,550 to 2,500 kilometers**) away.
- **Payload Flexibility:** Equipped with a **1,000-pound conventional warhead** or **cluster munitions**, enabling it to neutralize various types of targets.

Specifications at a Glance:

- **Length:** Approximately **18.3 feet** (5.6 meters)
- **Weight:** Around **3,200 pounds** (up to **4,400 pounds** with booster)
- **Propulsion:** Uses **solid fuel for launch**, followed by a **turbofan engine** that emits **minimal heat**, reducing infrared detection.
- **Cost per Unit:** Estimated at **\$2 million**, reflecting its advanced technology and precision capability.



Did You Know?

- The Tomahawk missile can **loiter** over a target area and even **change course mid-flight**, allowing operators to adjust the mission in real time.
- It has been integrated into the **Aegis Combat System**, enabling coordinated attacks and multi-target engagement.
- The latest **Block V variant**, currently being deployed, includes **enhanced range, navigation upgrades**, and **anti-ship capabilities**, making it a versatile tool in **both land and maritime warfare**.

Conclusion: The Power of Precision

As modern warfare increasingly relies on **speed, accuracy, and survivability**, the **Tomahawk missile** stands out as a symbol of **technological superiority** and **strategic dominance**. Its role in recent conflicts demonstrates not only its **lethal efficiency** but also its ability to influence **geopolitical outcomes**.



3 Sariska Tiger Reserve: A Wild Haven Amidst Heritage and Controversy

Context: A new proposal to **redefine the boundaries** of the **Critical Tiger Habitat (CTH)** within **Sariska Tiger Reserve** in Rajasthan could prove pivotal for **over 50 marble and dolomite mines**. These mines were shut down last year following a **Supreme Court directive** due to their proximity to the CTH. If approved, the revised boundary plan might allow operations to resume—raising questions about the delicate balance between **conservation and commerce**.



An Overview of Sariska Tiger Reserve:

Located in the **Alwar district of Rajasthan**, **Sariska Tiger Reserve** is nestled in the rugged terrain of the **Aravalli hills**, one of the **oldest mountain ranges in the world**. Covering a wide expanse of diverse landscapes, it offers a fascinating blend of **natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage**.

Originally a **royal hunting ground** for the **Maharaja of Alwar**, Sariska was declared a **wildlife sanctuary in 1955** and later upgraded to a **national park in 1979**. Today, it plays a crucial role in **India's Project Tiger**, acting as a safe haven for the **Bengal tiger** and many other threatened species.

Diverse Terrain and Vegetation:

Sariska boasts a **rocky, undulating landscape** featuring **scrub thorn forests, semi-deciduous woodlands, grassy meadows, and cliff-lined valleys**. The region's vegetation is typical of **Northern Tropical Dry Deciduous and Thorn Forests**, making it a unique ecological zone.

The reserve is dominated by the **dhok tree**, with other important plant species like **salar, kadaya, ber, gugal, bamboo, banyan, and kair** also thriving here. These provide critical habitat and food for the area's rich fauna.

Wildlife Wonders of Sariska:

Apart from the iconic **Bengal tiger**, Sariska is home to an array of wildlife:

- **Leopards**
- **Sambhars**
- **Chitals (spotted deer)**
- **Nilgai (blue bull)**
- **Wild boars**
- **Four-horned antelope (chausingha)**

The park is also a haven for **bird watchers**, hosting species like the **crested serpent eagle, great horned owl, and peafowl**, which is also **India's national bird**.

A Reserve Rich in History and Heritage:

Sariska is not just about wildlife—it's also steeped in **cultural and historical significance**. Within and around the reserve are several **ancient temples, forts, and scenic lakes**, including:

- **Bhangarh Fort** – considered one of India's most haunted places
- **Pandu Pol** – associated with the Mahabharata
- **Ajabgarh and Pratapgarh Forts**



- **Siliserh Lake** and **Jai Samand Lake**, known for their tranquil beauty

These landmarks make Sariska a **blend of wilderness and wonder**, attracting both nature enthusiasts and history buffs.

Did You Know?

- Sariska became the first reserve in India to successfully **relocate tigers** after poaching had wiped them out by 2005. The reintroduction program began in 2008.
- The park is one of the few reserves where **religious shrines** remain active within the forest, leading to **year-round pilgrim activity**.
- The **Kankwari Fort**, located within the reserve, once served as the **prison of Dara Shikoh**, the elder brother of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb.

Conclusion: A Fragile Balance Between Conservation and Development

Sariska Tiger Reserve stands as a powerful symbol of **ecological restoration, cultural legacy, and biodiversity protection**. As debates over mining and habitat preservation intensify, it reminds us that the future of India's wildlife—and its rich history—relies on **careful stewardship** and **sustainable decision-making**.



Context: A recent rare sighting of a **Himalayan brown bear** along with its **family** in the remote **Nelong and Jadung Valleys** of **Gangotri National Park, Uttarakhand**, has thrilled wildlife enthusiasts and conservationists alike. Such appearances are uncommon, and the event has renewed interest in the conservation of one of the **rarest and most endangered bear species in the world**.



Introduction: The Mighty Bear of the Mountains

The **Himalayan brown bear** (*Ursus arctos isabellinus*) is the **largest land mammal** inhabiting the **high-altitude regions of the Himalayas**. Sometimes referred to as the **“Isabelline Bear”** or **“Himalayan Red Bear”**, it is known as **Denmo** in **Ladakhi**. This majestic bear is believed to be part of one of the **oldest surviving lineages** of brown bears.

Fascinatingly, the Himalayan brown bear is also thought to have contributed to the **myth of the Yeti**, owing to its **upright walking posture** and large footprints in the snow.

Habitat and Range:

These bears are found in the **northwestern and central Himalayas**, including regions of:

- **India**
- **Nepal**
- **Pakistan**
- **Bhutan**
- **Tibet (China)**

In India, their populations are **scattered and isolated**, surviving in the **alpine and subalpine zones** of **Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand**. They generally live **above the timberline**, between **3,000 to 5,500 meters** (roughly **9,800 to 18,000 feet**) above sea level.

Physical Characteristics and Behavior:

- **Size:** Males are typically **1.9 meters long** and weigh around **135 kg**, while females are smaller at about **1.6 meters** and **70 kg**.
- **Appearance:** They possess a thick, dense coat, often **sandy or reddish-brown**, adapted to survive the **harsh alpine climate**.
- **Diet:** These bears are **omnivores**, consuming **grasses, roots, fruits, bulbs, insects, and small mammals** like **pikas, voles, and marmots**.
- **Social Behavior:** Naturally **solitary**, they usually only come together to **mate** or **compete for mates**. **Mothers and cubs** form the only lasting social bonds.
- **Hibernation:** In winter, they retreat into **dens** to hibernate, often digging burrows in **rocky slopes** or **under thick vegetation**.
- **Lifespan:** In the wild, they can live up to **30 years**.

Conservation Status: A Species on the Brink

The **Himalayan brown bear** is classified as **Critically Endangered** on the **IUCN Red List**, signaling an **extremely high risk of extinction** in the wild. Its legal protections include:



- **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 – Schedule I** (highest protection under Indian law)
- **CITES Appendix I** – Banning international trade

Their survival is threatened by:

- **Habitat fragmentation**
- **Human-wildlife conflict**
- **Climate change**
- **Poaching for body parts** (often used in traditional medicine)

Did You Know?

- The **Himalayan brown bear's presence** is considered an **indicator of ecosystem health** in high-altitude environments.
- It is **genetically distinct** from other brown bear populations, adding to its conservation value.
- The **Trans-Himalayan region**, particularly **Ladakh and Uttarakhand**, is now being prioritized for **species recovery programs** and **wildlife corridor development**.

Conclusion: Preserving the Monarch of the Mountains

The **Himalayan brown bear** is not just a wildlife marvel—it is a symbol of the fragile beauty and complexity of the **Himalayan ecosystem**. Its rare sighting in **Gangotri National Park** offers hope, but also a **stark reminder** of the urgent need for **dedicated conservation action**.

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5 Political Financing in India: Soaring Costs, Shrinking Transparency

Context: According to a recent report by the **Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR)**, a significant number of political parties **failed to comply** with mandatory regulations regarding the disclosure of election expenditures after the **2024 General Elections**. Parties delayed filing their statements to the **Election Commission of India (ECI)** by anywhere from **1 to 232 days**, while some **did not file at all**.



As per current norms, parties must submit their **election expenditure reports** within **90 days** for general elections and **75 days** for assembly elections. The widespread **non-compliance** has sparked growing concerns about the **transparency, legality, and ethical standards** of political financing in the country.

The High Cost of Power: Elections That Break the Bank

The **2024 Lok Sabha elections** became the **most expensive democratic exercise in the world**, with total spending estimated at an astronomical **₹1.35 lakh crore**. This staggering figure not only reflects the rising cost of campaigning but also exposes the **deep financial disparities** among political players.

Wealth has increasingly become a **decisive factor** in electoral outcomes, pushing candidates without substantial financial backing to the margins and **undermining democratic equity**.

Opaque Funding: The Black Hole of Donations

One of the most pressing challenges in Indian political financing is the **lack of transparency in funding sources**. From **2004–05 to 2022–23**, around **60% of the total donations** received by the six major national parties came from **undisclosed sources**. Mechanisms like **Electoral Bonds**—now struck down by the Supreme Court—enabled **anonymous contributions**, making it nearly impossible for citizens to trace the origin of political funds.

Unequal Playing Field: Funding Disparities Across Parties

A sharp **disparity in political funding** continues to erode democratic competitiveness. In the 2024 elections, **national parties alone secured over 93% of the total funds raised**, leaving regional and smaller parties at a distinct disadvantage. This **financial imbalance** translates into **unequal media visibility**, outreach capacity, and organizational strength, ultimately skewing the electoral contest in favor of the wealthy and powerful.

Spending Beyond Limits: The Illusion of Regulation

Though the ECI prescribes spending limits—**₹95 lakh** for Lok Sabha candidates and **₹40 lakh** for Assembly candidates—**real spending far exceeds these thresholds**. This is facilitated by:

- **Third-party campaigners**
- **Shadow financing**
- **Loopholes in the Model Code of Conduct**

Enforcement mechanisms remain weak, allowing candidates to **bypass oversight with impunity**.

Did You Know?

- India has **no legal cap** on how much a political party can spend on its overall campaign—only individual candidates are bound by limits.
- The Supreme Court, in a landmark 2024 ruling, declared **Electoral Bonds unconstitutional**, citing a violation of the **Right to Information** under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution.



- According to ADR, **over 40% of sitting MPs** in the current Lok Sabha have **declared criminal cases**, raising concerns about both financial and ethical integrity in politics.

Conclusion: A Call for Comprehensive Reform

India's democracy, while vibrant in participation, is increasingly **strained by the rising cost of elections and falling transparency in financing**. The dominance of **undisclosed money, non-compliance with financial reporting, and growing inequality in political capital** call for urgent **electoral and institutional reforms**.

Introducing **real-time public disclosure of donations, strict penalties for non-compliance, and state funding of elections** are among the many solutions proposed by experts to restore **credibility, fairness, and transparency** to India's political landscape.



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Palm Trees: Vital Green Giants Facing Threats in India

Context: The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has issued a notice to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and other concerned authorities over the **widespread cutting of palm trees in Bihar**. This large-scale deforestation is now being linked to a **rise in lightning-related fatalities** in the region. Palm trees, with their **towering height and conductive structure**, are believed to play a significant role in **dissipating lightning energy**, potentially reducing its impact on humans and infrastructure.



Introduction: The Palm Tree — A Symbol of Strength and Sustainability

Belonging to the **Arecaceae (Palmae) family**, the **palm tree** is a **monocotyledonous, evergreen plant** known for its versatile form—ranging from **shrubs and tall trees** to **climbing vines (lianas)**. It is one of the most **ancient and ecologically important plant groups**, with several species playing crucial roles in **agriculture, culture, and environmental stability**.

Geographic Distribution: A Tropical Citizen of the World

Palm trees are widely distributed across:

- **The Americas**
- **Asia** (including India, Japan, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands)
- **Africa and Madagascar** (to a lesser extent)
- **Australia** and nearby island chains

They thrive in **tropical and subtropical climates**, contributing significantly to the **biodiversity and economy** of these regions.

Distinctive Features of Palm Trees:

- **Structure:** Typically, palm trees have a **tall, cylindrical, unbranched stem** of uniform thickness from base to crown. Some, like the **Hyphaene species**, may show **dichotomous branching**.
- **Leaves:** Two main types:
 - **Palmate leaves** resemble open hands, sprouting in clusters.
 - **Pinnate leaves** are feather-like, arranged on either side of a stem.
- **Longevity and Growth:** Palms can live for decades and are adapted to **nutrient-poor soils** and **coastal environments**.
- **Ecological Role:** They provide **shade**, support **wildlife habitats**, and play a role in **climate regulation**.

Economic and Cultural Importance:

Among the most commercially significant species are:

- **Coconut Palm (Cocos nucifera):** A vital source of **coconut oil, water, coir, and timber**.
- **African Oil Palm (Elaeis guineensis):** The primary global source of **palm oil**, widely used in food, cosmetics, and biofuel.

Palm products support **millions of livelihoods** globally and hold cultural value in **traditional rituals, cuisine, and medicine**.



Conservation Concerns: A Silent Crisis

Despite their resilience, nearly **100 species of palm trees** are now classified as **endangered**, mainly due to:

- **Deforestation**
- **Urban expansion**
- **Unsustainable harvesting**
- **Climate change**

Many palms are now restricted to **small habitats**, making them vulnerable to extinction. Conservationists warn that losing palm diversity would mean losing a **keystone species** critical for **ecosystem stability**.

Did You Know?

- Some species like the **Talipot Palm (Corypha umbraculifera)** bloom **only once in their lifetime**—after 30–80 years—and then die.
- **Palms are among the oldest cultivated plants**, with evidence dating back over **5,000 years** in Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley.
- In some parts of India, traditional communities use **palm leaves as manuscripts** for ancient scriptures and astrological charts.

Conclusion: Preserving a Symbol of Life and Livelihood

Palm trees are more than just a tropical icon—they are **climate regulators**, **economic assets**, and **cultural treasures**. The recent concern over their felling in Bihar underscores the **need for stronger environmental oversight** and **community-based conservation** efforts.

As the world grapples with biodiversity loss and climate instability, protecting palm trees is a small but crucial step toward **sustaining both nature and human life**.