



Daily Current Affairs



To The Point

by Dhananjay Gautam

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GS Paper 3 – Economy

1 India Sets Ambitious Goal: Tourism to Contribute 10% to GDP by 2047

Context: The **Government of India** has unveiled an ambitious roadmap to elevate the contribution of the **tourism sector to 10% of the national GDP** by the year **2047**, aligning with the centenary of India's independence. This marks a major push to position **India as a leading global tourism hub**, leveraging its vast cultural, spiritual, ecological, and medical potential.



The Current Landscape: A Rising Economic Pillar

- **Current Contribution:** Tourism currently contributes around **5–6%** to India's **\$4 trillion economy**.
- **Future Target:** By 2047, India's economy is projected to reach **\$32 trillion**, with tourism expected to make up **\$3.2 trillion** of that figure.
- **Global Position:** India ranked **14th** in global tourism receipts in 2023, capturing **1.8%** of global tourism revenue.
- **Growth Forecast:** The Indian tourism sector is anticipated to grow at a **Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 24%**, making it one of the fastest-growing sectors in the country.

India's Tourism Treasures: A Land of Endless Experiences

India offers an unparalleled variety of experiences that cater to every kind of traveler. From the majestic **Himalayas** to the serene **coastal retreats**, India's diversity fuels its tourism growth.

1. **Spiritual Tourism:** India is a **spiritual heartland**, home to major world religions and sacred sites. Pilgrimage destinations like **Varanasi, Rameshwaram, Bodh Gaya, and Golden Temple** draw millions each year.
2. **Adventure Tourism:** For thrill-seekers, destinations like **Ladakh, Spiti, Sikkim, and Meghalaya** offer trekking, paragliding, white-water rafting, and more.
3. **Beach Tourism:** The golden shores of **Goa**, tranquil backwaters of **Kerala**, and pristine islands of **Andaman & Nicobar** and **Lakshadweep** are a magnet for beach lovers.
4. **Cultural & Heritage Tourism:** India is home to **40 UNESCO World Heritage Sites**, including **Taj Mahal, Hampi, Khajuraho, and Qutub Minar**. Fairs and festivals like **Pushkar Fair, Taj Mahotsav, and Surajkund Mela** showcase India's vibrant traditions.
5. **Wildlife Tourism:** India boasts over **100 national parks and 500+ wildlife sanctuaries**, home to endangered species like the **Royal Bengal Tiger, Asiatic Lion, and one-horned rhinoceros**.
6. **Medical and Wellness Tourism:** With world-class healthcare at competitive costs, India attracts patients globally through the **"Heal in India" initiative**. Traditional wellness systems like **Ayurveda, Yoga, and Siddha** also boost **wellness tourism**.

Key Government Initiatives to Drive Growth:

The Government is implementing multi-pronged strategies to **revamp infrastructure, enhance services, and position India competitively** on the global tourism map.

1. **Top 50 Destination Challenge:** Under the **2025 Union Budget**, a new initiative will develop **50 world-class destinations** in collaboration with states through a **"challenge mode"** to improve infrastructure, connectivity, and visitor experience.

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2. **Swadesh Darshan 2.0:** A revamped scheme promoting **theme-based circuits** such as **Buddhist, Spiritual, Heritage, and Eco circuits**, with focus on quality infrastructure and immersive experiences.
3. **PRASHAD Scheme:** Focused on spiritual tourism, this scheme is **revitalizing pilgrimage centers** like **Ayodhya, Kashi Vishwanath, and Amritsar** with upgraded amenities and transport.
4. **Medical Value Travel:** India is being positioned as a **global medical hub**, with specialized visa processes, healthcare facilitation centers, and partnerships with hospitals.
5. **Atithi Devo Bhava:** This initiative promotes the **Indian tradition of hospitality**, with training programs to enhance **service quality** in tourism and hospitality sectors.
6. **Visa Reforms:** The **e-Visa facility** for citizens of over **160 countries** and **visa fee waivers** for select groups simplify international travel and encourage global tourist footfall.
7. **Sustainable Tourism Initiatives:** Promotion of **eco-friendly, community-based, and responsible tourism** models to ensure growth without compromising on environmental and cultural heritage.

Challenges on the Path Ahead:

Despite the potential, India's tourism industry must overcome key barriers:

- **Infrastructure Gaps:** Many remote or high-potential sites lack roads, transport, and basic facilities.
- **Environmental Concerns:** Over-tourism has caused degradation in fragile ecosystems like **Himalayas** and **Western Ghats**.
- **Quality Control:** Service inconsistency across hotels, guides, and transport providers hampers tourist satisfaction.
- **Seasonal Fluctuations:** Destinations like **Manali** and **Goa** witness boom-and-bust cycles, affecting local livelihoods.
- **Promotion Deficit:** Lesser-known but beautiful regions like **Northeast India, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha** need better branding and marketing.

Budget 2025–26: Employment-Led Tourism Growth

To ensure inclusive and employment-driven growth, the government has introduced:

- **MUDRA Loans for Homestays:** Empowering locals to host tourists and create micro-entrepreneurs.
- **Incentives to States:** Performance-based rewards for excellence in destination management, cleanliness, and tourist amenities.
- **Streamlined Visa Processing:** Enhancing ease of access and attractiveness to international tourists.

The Road to 2047: India's Global Tourism Footprint

India's tourism vision is aligned with **Vision@2047**, aiming to transform the nation into a **top-5 global tourism economy**. By tapping into its **rich heritage, diverse landscapes, and hospitality culture**, India seeks not only economic growth but also a **cultural renaissance**.

"India is not just a destination—it's an emotion. From the snow-clad peaks of Kashmir to the tropical charm of Kerala, every corner tells a story waiting to be discovered."

Additional Insights:

- **Digital Push:** Integration of AI and digital platforms like **incredibleindia.org** and virtual reality experiences for global outreach.

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- **Community Tourism Models:** Promotion of **eco-villages** and **tribal tourism** to bring income directly to indigenous communities.
- **Women in Tourism:** New initiatives aim to train and employ more **women guides, entrepreneurs,** and **hospitality workers**, fostering gender equality.

Conclusion: With visionary policy, enhanced infrastructure, global outreach, and community involvement, **India is poised to become a world-class tourist destination.** The government's commitment to "**Seva**" (service) and "**Atithi Devo Bhava**" (the guest is god) lies at the heart of this transformation. As India marches toward **2047**, its tourism sector is not just growing—it is redefining the way the world sees and experiences India.



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GS Paper 3 – Biodiversity and Conservation

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Global Wetland Outlook 2025: A Call to Protect Earth's Most Vital Ecosystems

Context: The **Global Wetland Outlook 2025**, released by the **Ramsar Convention on Wetlands**, presents the most comprehensive and up-to-date evaluation of the **state, trends, value, and policy responses** concerning wetlands across the world. Prepared by the **Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP)** of the Convention, this report is a wake-up call to governments, industries, and civil society to act **urgently and decisively** to preserve and restore wetlands — the planet's most valuable yet threatened ecosystems.

Wetlands: Earth's Lifelines at Risk

The Outlook assesses **eleven broad types of wetlands**, including:

- Seagrass
- Kelp Forests
- Coral Reefs
- Estuarine Waters
- Salt Marshes
- Mangroves
- Tidal Flats
- Lakes
- Rivers and Streams
- Inland Marshes and Swamps
- Peatlands (Mires)

These ecosystems, essential for life on Earth, are rapidly disappearing.

Major Alarming Findings:

A Shrinking Natural Asset:

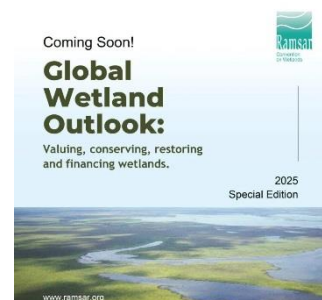
- Since **1970**, the world has lost around **411 million hectares** of wetlands — a **22% decline** in global wetland extent.
- The **annual loss rate** stands at **-0.52%**, with some wetland types declining as fast as **-1.8% per year**.

Global Degradation Patterns:

- The most significant losses were reported in **Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean**.
- Even developed regions like **Europe, North America, and Oceania** showed alarming levels of **wetland degradation**.

Main Drivers of Destruction:

- **Urban expansion, industrial development, and infrastructure projects** remain the key drivers in many developing nations.
- **Invasive species** plague wetlands in North America and Oceania.



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- **Prolonged droughts** are emerging as a major threat across **Europe**.

Economic and Ecological Importance:

Wetlands: A Trillion-Dollar Ecosystem

- The remaining **1,425 million hectares** of wetlands generate between **\$7.98 trillion to \$39.01 trillion** annually in **ecosystem services**.
- If conserved and managed properly, wetlands can contribute over **\$205.25 trillion** in **net present value (NPV)** by 2050.

Restoration vs Conservation:

- The cost of **wetland restoration** can range from **\$1,000 to \$70,000 per hectare per year**.
- **Conservation** of healthy wetlands is **far more cost-effective** and efficient than post-degradation restoration.

Financial Shortfalls and Global Inaction:

Despite their immense value, wetlands remain **underfunded** and neglected in global environmental finance:

- Current **biodiversity conservation investment** is only **0.25% of global GDP**.
- This highlights a **massive financing gap** that must be addressed through both **public and private sector participation**.

Urgent Recommendations:

To reverse wetland decline, the report urges:

- **Integration of wetlands into global financing mechanisms**, such as the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF)**.
- Unlocking a **blend of public and private finance** to treat wetlands as **nature-based solutions** to climate change, water management, and biodiversity loss.
- Enhancing **political will, public awareness, and institutional capacity** at all levels.

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF):

Adopted at **COP15 to the Convention on Biological Diversity** in 2022, the **GBF** is dubbed the "**Paris Agreement for Nature**."

Key Highlights of the GBF:

- Contains **4 overarching global goals** and **23 specific targets** to be achieved by 2030.
- **Target 3 or "30x30 Goal"**:
 - Protect **30% of global land and marine areas** by 2030.
 - Restore **30% of degraded ecosystems**.
 - Achieve **near-zero biodiversity loss** in intact ecosystems by the end of the decade.

Understanding Wetlands: The Unsung Ecosystems

Wetlands are areas where water dominates the land — either permanently or seasonally — and form **unique ecosystems**.

They include:

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- **Natural wetlands:** Rivers, lakes, mangroves, coral reefs, peatlands, deltas, and swamps.
- **Human-made wetlands:** Fish ponds, rice paddies, reservoirs, and artificial lakes.

Wetlands are usually classified into **inland**, **coastal**, and **man-made** wetlands

Wetlands in India: A Rich Yet Vulnerable Treasure

India is home to a wide variety of wetland types:

- **Himalayan high-altitude wetlands**
- **Floodplains** of the **Ganga** and **Brahmaputra**
- **Mangrove forests** along the **Sundarbans**
- **Coral reefs** in **Lakshadweep** and **Andaman & Nicobar Islands**

Current Status:

- Wetlands cover **4.6% of India's land area**.
- India has **91 Ramsar Sites**, the **highest in South Asia** and **third-highest in Asia**.

Ecological Importance of Wetlands:

- **Biodiversity Reservoirs:** Home to countless endangered and endemic species.
- **Water Purifiers:** Naturally remove pollutants, sediments, and heavy metals.
- **Flood Regulators:** Absorb excess rainfall and mitigate natural disasters.
- **Carbon Sinks:** Peatlands and marshes store vast amounts of **carbon**, helping to combat **climate change**.
- **Livelihood Supporters:** Wetlands sustain agriculture, aquaculture, and tourism industries.

Ramsar Convention: Global Guardian of Wetlands

- **Established in 1971** in **Ramsar, Iran** and came into force in **1975**.
- Focuses on the **wise use and conservation** of wetlands.
- Wetlands under the Convention are known as **Ramsar Sites**.

Key Criteria for Ramsar Sites:

- Support for **endangered species** and **ecological communities**.
- Provide habitat to **20,000+ waterbirds** regularly.
- Function as important **spawning or breeding grounds** for fish and other aquatic life.

Conclusion: A Race Against Time

The **Global Wetland Outlook 2025** paints a stark picture: **wetlands are disappearing faster than forests**, and with them, **life-sustaining services are vanishing**. Yet, with the right policies, financing, and collective will, it is **not too late**.



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GS Paper 3 – Environment & Biodiversity

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Kerala Emerges as India's Biodiversity Discovery Champion

Context: In a record-breaking year for **India's biodiversity documentation**, Kerala has taken the lead as the **top contributor of new faunal discoveries** in the country. According to the recently released 'Animal Discoveries: New Species and New Records 2024' report by the **Zoological Survey of India (ZSI)**, a staggering **683 new species and subspecies** were documented in India in 2024 — the **highest-ever tally** since formal records began in **2008**.



Of these, **459 species are entirely new to science**, while **224 species** were recorded for the **first time in India**.

Kerala Leads the Nation:

Kerala alone accounted for **101 faunal discoveries**, of which **80 are new species** and **21 are new records** for India. This exceptional achievement places Kerala ahead of other biodiversity-rich states:

- **Karnataka:** 82 species
- **Arunachal Pradesh:** 72 species
- **Tamil Nadu:** 63 species
- **West Bengal:** 56 species
- **Meghalaya:** 42 species
- **Andaman and Nicobar Islands:** 43 new faunal entries, including 14 new species and 29 new records

Noteworthy Discoveries: From the Forest Floor to the Canopy

Among the most remarkable finds is a **new snake species from Himachal Pradesh**, named *Anguiculus dicaprio* in honor of actor and environmentalist **Leonardo DiCaprio**, recognizing his work in **climate action and biodiversity conservation**.

Additional highlights include:

- **Two new genera and 37 new reptilian species**
- **Five amphibians**, including one from a **new genus**
- Contributions to herpetology, entomology, and marine fauna

Botanical Breakthroughs: Flora Flourishes Too

The **Botanical Survey of India (BSI)** also released its report documenting **433 new plant taxa** in 2024. Once again, **Kerala led the count**, with **58 new plant discoveries**, which included:

- **154 angiosperms**
- **63 lichens**
- **156 fungi**
- **32 algae**
- **9 microbial species**

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With these additions, **India's documented plant diversity** has now reached an impressive **56,177 species**, reaffirming the country's position as one of the **most biodiverse nations on the planet**.

Why Kerala Stands Out as a Biodiversity Powerhouse:

Kerala's dominance in biodiversity discoveries can be attributed to a combination of **ecological richness** and **scientific rigor**:

- Home to the **Western Ghats**, one of the world's most significant **biodiversity hotspots**
- A diverse range of ecosystems: **coastal wetlands, tropical rainforests, montane forests, and freshwater lakes**
- Proactive **field surveys** and the use of **modern techniques** like **DNA barcoding**
- Strong collaboration between **ZSI scientists, local experts, and academic institutions**

India's Biodiversity Hotspots: Where Life Thrives

India is one of the **17 megadiverse countries** globally and hosts **four globally recognized biodiversity hotspots**. These regions are identified by **Conservation International** and were conceptualized by ecologist **Norman Myers**.

The Four Hotspots in India:

1. **Western Ghats** (*Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra, Gujarat*) – Notable species: **Lion-tailed macaque, Nilgiri tahr, Malabar civet**
2. **Himalayas** (*J&K, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam*) – Unique fauna: **Snow leopard, Red panda, Himalayan monal**
3. **Indo-Burma** (*Northeast India and Andaman Islands*) – Home to: **Clouded leopard, Golden langur, Hoolock gibbon**
4. **Sundaland** (*Nicobar Islands*) – Rich in: **Nicobar megapode, saltwater crocodile, marine coral ecosystems**

These hotspots are ecologically fragile but **teeming with endemic life forms**, making them **critical areas for conservation**.

Why These Regions Matter

- **High Endemism**: Species found nowhere else on Earth
- **Vital Ecosystem Services**: Water regulation, soil protection, carbon storage
- **Cultural Relevance**: Integral to indigenous communities' traditions and livelihoods
- **Global Priority**: Though they cover only **2.3% of Earth's surface**, they host **over 50% of endemic plant species**

Growing Threats to Biodiversity:

Despite their importance, India's rich ecosystems face mounting threats:

- **Deforestation and habitat loss**
- **Climate change and glacial retreat**
- **Illegal wildlife trade and poaching**
- **Infrastructure expansion, mining, and urban sprawl**

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- **Invasive species and agricultural encroachment**

These pressures highlight the urgent need for **sustainable and community-led conservation** efforts.

Conservation Initiatives: Protecting India's Natural Wealth

India has been proactive in preserving its biodiversity through:

- **Protected Areas:** 106 national parks, 566 wildlife sanctuaries, and 18 biosphere reserves
- **Legislation:** *Wildlife Protection Act, 1972* – *Biological Diversity Act, 2002*
- **People-Centric Approaches:** Sacred groves, eco-development, and Joint Forest Management (JFM)
- **International Commitments:** Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) – Sustainable Development Goal 15: "Life on Land"

Conclusion: A Moment of Celebration and Caution

Kerala's ascent as **India's top biodiversity discovery hotspot** is not just a scientific milestone — it is a reminder of the **natural heritage we must protect**. As India continues to uncover new species at a record pace, the emphasis must shift from **discovery to conservation**.



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4 Bitra Island: Lakshadweep's Smallest Inhabited Isle May Soon Host Defence Base

Context: Bitra Island, the **smallest inhabited island** in the **Lakshadweep archipelago**, has come under the spotlight as the **Union Territory administration** is reportedly considering its **acquisition for defence purposes**. If finalized, Bitra would become the **third island in Lakshadweep** to host a **defence establishment**, joining **INS Dweeprakshak** in **Kavaratti** and **INS Jatayu** in **Minicoy**.



Where is Bitra Island?

Located in the **northernmost region of Lakshadweep**, Bitra Island is a **tiny coral atoll** that holds both **strategic and cultural significance**. Despite its small size, it is **inhabited** and serves as a **key location in India's western maritime frontier**.

A Place of Pilgrimage:

Bitra is also known for a **small but sacred shrine** dedicated to **Malik Mulla**, an **Arab saint** believed to be **buried on the island**. This makes Bitra a **spiritual destination**, attracting occasional pilgrims from across Lakshadweep.

Climatic Conditions:

The **climate of Bitra** closely mirrors that of **coastal Kerala**. The **hottest months** stretch from **March to May**, with **temperatures ranging between 25°C and 35°C**, and **humidity levels** typically hovering between **70% and 76%** throughout the year. This **tropical marine climate** is influenced by the **Southwest Monsoon**, like the rest of Lakshadweep.

A Lost Haven for Seabirds:

In the past, **Bitra Island served as a significant breeding ground** for various **seabird species**, highlighting its **ecological importance**. Though human settlement and changing climatic patterns have altered its biodiversity, the island still remains **biologically sensitive** and forms part of the **Lakshadweep Archipelago's fragile coral ecosystem**.

Strategic and Defence Relevance:

With India strengthening its **maritime security posture** in the **Indian Ocean Region (IOR)**, Bitra's potential role as a **defence outpost** gains importance. Positioned closer to key international shipping lanes and far from the mainland, **Bitra offers a strategic vantage point** for **monitoring naval activity** and **enhancing coastal security**.

Once operationalized, a base here would:

- Expand the **Indian Navy's surveillance reach**
- Strengthen India's **blue water capabilities**
- Support **search and rescue operations** and **disaster relief efforts**
- Enhance **logistical support** for vessels operating in the Arabian Sea

A Glimpse Into Bitra's Life:

- **Population:** The island has a **very small population**, primarily composed of **fisherfolk** and **government employees**.



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- **Connectivity:** Like other remote islands in Lakshadweep, **access to Bitra is limited**, mostly dependent on **boat services** and **helicopter operations** from larger islands like Agatti.
- **Infrastructure:** Facilities on the island are **minimal**, making it a likely candidate for **strategic infrastructure development** if the defence acquisition proceeds.

Conclusion: Bitra on the Brink of Transformation

From a **quiet, remote isle** with spiritual and ecological value, **Bitra Island is poised to play a vital role in India's defence architecture** in the Arabian Sea. As India continues to prioritize its **maritime security and island development**, Bitra could soon evolve into a **strategic cornerstone** in the country's oceanic frontier.



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5 Indian Astronomical Observatory Captures Rare Interstellar Comet in Ladakh's Skies

Context: In a groundbreaking celestial event, **Indian astronomers have successfully captured images of the interstellar comet C/2025 N1 (ATLAS)**—also referred to as **3I/ATLAS**—using the **Himalayan Chandra Telescope (HCT)** located at the **Indian Astronomical Observatory (IAO)** in **Hanle, Ladakh**. This marks a **major milestone** for Indian space science, showcasing the country's growing capability in **observational astronomy** and **deep-space tracking**.



About the Indian Astronomical Observatory (IAO):

Often referred to as the **Hanle Observatory**, the **Indian Astronomical Observatory** is situated in the **remote Hanle Valley of Ladakh**, at an **altitude of 4,500 metres above sea level**, making it **one of the highest observatories in the world**. It was officially inaugurated in **2001** and is operated by the **Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA)**, Bengaluru.

Why Hanle? The Ideal Site for Astronomy

The **location of IAO** is nothing short of extraordinary. Nestled in a **dry, cold desert**, with **minimal human activity**, **low humidity**, and **crystal-clear skies**, Hanle offers one of the best viewing platforms on the planet for astronomical observations. The **atmospheric clarity** at Hanle enables observations in:

- **Optical wavelengths**
- **Infrared**
- **Sub-millimetre and millimetre bands**

This makes it a **world-class site** comparable to global observatories in Chile, Hawaii, and the Canary Islands.

Key Features of the Observatory:

- **Himalayan Chandra Telescope (HCT):** A **2-meter aperture optical-infrared telescope**, remotely operated from **CREST (Centre for Research and Education in Science and Technology)** in Bengaluru. It plays a key role in imaging supernovae, gamma-ray bursts, variable stars, and now even **interstellar comets**.
- **Solar Power Plant:** Ensures energy efficiency in this remote location.
- **Satellite Communication Systems:** Enables seamless data transfer and real-time remote operation.
- **Liquid Nitrogen Plant:** Used to cool sensitive astronomical detectors and instruments.

Hanle: India's First Dark Sky Reserve

In a rare honour, **Hanle has been declared as India's first Dark Sky Reserve** by the **International Dark-Sky Association (IDA)**. This designation is given to places that maintain **exceptionally dark night skies**, actively protect them from **light pollution**, and foster **scientific research and eco-tourism**.

What makes Hanle special:

- Fewer than **1,000 residents**, ensuring minimal artificial lighting
- Pristine, **unpolluted skies** perfect for stargazing and astrophotography
- Proximity to **Hanle Monastery**, blending ancient culture with cutting-edge science



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Hanle is now a major hub for **astro-tourism**, offering breathtaking views of the **Milky Way**, **meteor showers**, and **planetary movements**.

Interstellar Comet 3I/ATLAS: A Rare Visitor from Deep Space

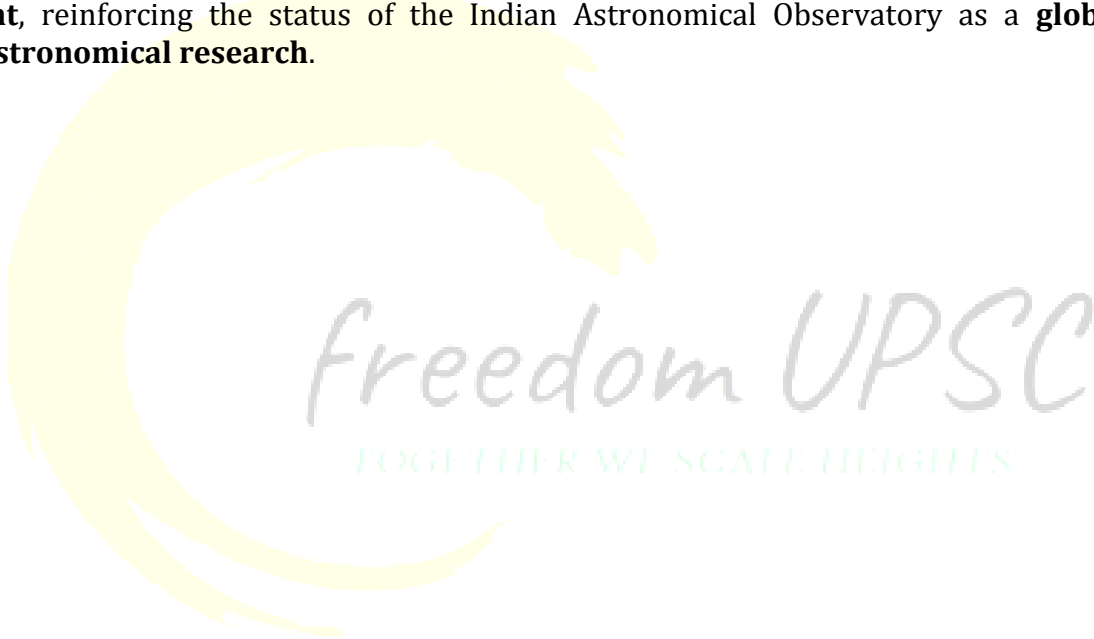
The comet **C/2025 N1 (ATLAS)**—now officially the **third known interstellar object** to visit our Solar System—was captured in detail by the IAO. These interstellar objects originate from **outside our Solar System**, making their detection both **scientifically invaluable** and **rare**. Previously, only two such visitors had been recorded:

1. **'Oumuamua (1I/'Oumuamua)** in 2017
2. **2I/Borisov** in 2019

The ability of the **IAO in Hanle** to image 3I/ATLAS proves its **high-precision tracking capabilities**, even of **high-velocity, transient deep-space objects**.

Conclusion: Hanle Shines Bright in the World of Astronomy

The successful observation of 3I/ATLAS from **India's high-altitude observatory** is a **landmark achievement**, reinforcing the status of the Indian Astronomical Observatory as a **global centre for advanced astronomical research**.



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Sudan: Conflict Rekindles in the Heart of Northeast Africa

Context: Sudan, a country at the **crossroads of Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East**, is once again in the global spotlight following **deadly clashes between rival military factions** in its **Kordofan region**. The **ongoing internal strife**, rooted in political instability and power struggles, continues to claim civilian lives and destabilize the region.

Capital and Strategic Location:

- **Capital: Khartoum** — situated at the iconic **confluence of the White Nile and Blue Nile**, forming the world-renowned **Nile River**.
- **Geopolitical Position:** Sudan holds a **strategic location**, **bordering the Red Sea** to the east, making it a **critical maritime gateway** between **Africa and the Arabian Peninsula**.



Political Borders:

Sudan is surrounded by **seven countries**, which reflect its **strategic and sensitive location**:

- **North – Egypt**
- **East – Eritrea and Ethiopia**
- **South – South Sudan**
- **West – Central African Republic and Chad**
- **Northwest – Libya**

Its **eastern maritime boundary** along the **Red Sea** also enhances its **geopolitical importance** in **global trade** and **regional security**.

Physical Geography: Mountains and Mighty Rivers

- **Highest Peak: Jebel Marra** (also called the **Marrah Mountains**) – a volcanic mountain range in western Sudan, known for its **fertile highlands** and **unique biodiversity**.
- **Rivers: The White Nile and Blue Nile**, two of the **most important tributaries** of the Nile River, **merge in Khartoum**. This confluence forms the **lifeline of Northeast Africa**, supporting agriculture, transportation, and cultural development across multiple nations.

Extra Insight: Sudan's Role in the Nile Basin

Sudan is one of the **key riparian states** in the **Nile Basin**, making it central to water-sharing agreements and regional diplomacy involving **Egypt, Ethiopia, and South Sudan**. The **Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD)** has been a major point of contention involving Sudan, highlighting its **diplomatic balancing act** between national interests and regional cooperation.

Conclusion: A Nation of Geopolitical and Environmental Significance

Despite the **political turmoil** and **civil unrest**, Sudan remains a country of **immense historical, geographic, and strategic importance**. With its **location bridging Africa and the Middle East**, access to the **Red Sea**, and its place in the **Nile River system**, Sudan's future will significantly influence regional stability and development in the Horn of Africa.