

6. Short News

1. Sagar Maitri

Recently, INS Sagardhwani was flagged off from Kochi for the fifth edition of Sagar Maitri. INS Sagardhwani is a specialised marine acoustic research vessel designed by Naval Physical and Oceanographic Laboratory (NPOL) –DRDO, built by GRSE, and commissioned in 1994, serving ocean research for over three decades.

About Sagar Maitri – Sagar Maitri is a flagship collaborative oceanographic initiative of DRDO and the Indian Navy.

Aim– Strengthen scientific cooperation among Indian Ocean Rim (IOR) countries. Indian Ocean Rim (IOR) includes 23 member countries.

Origin– Initiated by **DRDO** under India's maritime vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) in April 2019. The scientific component MAITRI (Marine & Allied Interdisciplinary Training and Research Initiative) was launched to institutionalise long-term ocean research collaboration. Conducted as periodic mission-based initiatives (not strictly annual or biennial).

Sagar Maitri – V (SM-5) – Sagar Maitri-V marks the fifth edition of the initiative, undertaken using DRDO's marine acoustic research vessel INS Sagardhwani.

Objectives

1. To promote joint oceanographic and acoustic research among IOR nations.
2. To build scientific capacity and professional exchange in marine sciences.
3. To collect oceanographic and acoustic data relevant to Underwater Domain Awareness (UDA) of the Indian Navy.

Participating Countries (8)– Eight IOR countries Oman, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Myanmar.

Significance – Enhances India's leadership in maritime science diplomacy. Strengthens Underwater Domain Awareness, critical for naval security. Aligns with India's evolving maritime vision of MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions).

2. Pratas (Dongsha) Islands

Recently a Chinese reconnaissance drone briefly entered the airspace over Taiwan-controlled Pratas (Dongsha) Islands, escalating tensions in the region.

About Pratas Islands – The Pratas Islands, also known as Dongsha Islands, are a small group of coral islands forming an atoll in the northern South China Sea.

Location– It is situated between southern Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Geography– It comprises three islands forming a circular coral atoll.

1. Dongsha Island is the only island above sea level; the other two are submerged.
2. The atoll is about 24 km in diameter, enclosing a lagoon nearly 16 km wide.
3. Rich in coral reefs, marine biodiversity, and migratory bird habitats.

Current Administration– Controlled by Taiwan (Republic of China) and administered as Dongsha Atoll National Park.

4. It has no permanent civilian population; the Taiwanese marines are stationed on the island.
5. It is claimed by the People's Republic of China making it a point of contention.

Strategic Significance– It occupies a critical position at the northern edge of the South China Sea close to vital shipping lanes linking the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

6. It is considered strategically vulnerable due to its distance from mainland Taiwan, making it significant in cross-Strait and South China Sea security dynamics.