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'RAIN SNAKE' DISCOVERED IN MIZORAM

In news:

Taxonomists have discovered a non-venomous species of snake in Mizoram - Smithophisatemporalis.

About Smithophisatemporalis:

- It predominantly aquatic.
- It is locally called Ruahlawmrul or rain-loving snake. In Aizawl, the capital of Mizoram, this snake is commonly seen during the monsoons and frequents streams and other wet places, close to human habitation and is seen after rain showers.
- It has been named after eminent British herpetologist, Malcom A Smith, for his contribution to Indian herpetology - Smithophisatemporalis
- The maximum-recorded length of the species is 655 mm (approximately 2.5 feet)



UN DEAL TO REGULATE EXPORT OF PLASTIC WASTE

In news:

Around 180 governments have agreed on a new UN accord, aimed at restricting shipments of hard-to-recycle plastic waste to poorer countries.

In brief:

- It amended the 1989 Basel Convention on the control of hazardous wastes to include plastic waste in a legally-binding framework.
- The Geneva meeting also undertook to eliminate two toxic chemical groups—Dicofol and Perfluorooctanoic Acid, plus related compounds.
- Currently, the US and other countries can send lower-quality plastic waste to private entities in developing countries without getting approval from their governments.
- Much of this contaminated mixed waste cannot be recycled and is instead dumped or burned, or finds its way into the ocean.
- Exporting countries – including the US and Canada, now will have to obtain consent from countries receiving contaminated, mixed or unrecyclable plastic waste.

Basel Convention:

It is an international treaty that was designed to reduce the movements of hazardous waste between nations, and specifically to prevent transfer of hazardous waste from developed to less developed countries (LDCs).

Adopted on 22 March 1989 and entered into force on 5 May 1992.



NOTE



COMCASA

- India and the U.S. on September 6 signed the foundational or enabling agreement COMCASA on the side-lines of the inaugural 2+2 dialogue.
- COMCASA stands for Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement and is one of the four foundational agreements that the U.S. signs with allies and close partners to facilitate interoperability between militaries and sale of high end technology.
- COMCASA is an India-specific version of the Communication and Information on Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA). It comes into force immediately, and is valid for a period 10 years.
- COMCASA allows India to procure transfer specialised equipment for encrypted communications for US origin military platforms like the C-17, C-130 and P-8Is. Currently, these platforms use commercially available communication systems.
- The joint statement issued after the 2+2 dialogue said that it would facilitate access to advanced defence systems and enable India to optimally utilize its existing U.S.-origin platforms.
- Specific additional provisions have been incorporated in the text to safeguard our security and national interests.
- This will also enable greater communications interoperability between the militaries of India and the US. Data acquired through such systems cannot be disclosed or transferred to any person or entity without India's consent.
- Both countries will implement this agreement in a manner that is consistent with the national security interests of the other.
- India had signed the General Security Of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) in 2002 and the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016. The last one remaining is the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation (BECA).

IAF GETS ITS FIRST APACHE ATTACK HELICOPTER FROM BOEING

In News:

IAF gets its first Apache attack helicopter from Boeing, 21 more to come

In Brief:

1. The Apache is widely acknowledged to be the world's most lethal combat helicopter, having flown about a million mission hours in conflicts from the First Gulf War in 1991 to fighting in Afghanistan. Boeing handed over to the Indian Air Force (IAF) on Friday the first of the 22 Apache attack helicopters that India had contracted to buy in September 2015 for about \$3 billion at current prices.
2. The IAF is buying the latest version of the Apache, designated the AH-64E (I) Apache Guardian. The first batch of four-six helicopters will be shipped to India in July, said the defence ministry.
3. The Apaches are being acquired through a hybrid contract.
4. The helicopter itself has been contracted through a "direct commercial sale" with Boeing. However, the radar and assortment of weaponry including missiles, rockets and cannon bullets, are being acquired directly from the Pentagon through a "foreign military sale".
5. The Apache is widely acknowledged to be the world's most lethal combat helicopter, having flown about a million mission hours in conflicts from the First Gulf War in 1991 to the ongoing fighting in Afghanistan.
6. It can operate by day or night with equal effectiveness, flying just metres above the ground and sheltering behind trees and sand dunes. Its advanced Longbow radar picks up enemy armoured vehicles and then destroys them with anti-tank missiles, air-to-surface rockets or a chain gun that sends 625 rounds per minute ripping into the targets.
7. Designed to operate as the airborne component of a highly mobile, armour-heavy strike corps, the Apache has been dubbed the "flying tank".

NOTE



8. Ground combat experts said the Apache should have been a straightforward buy of a premier tank-killing platform for the Army's three strike corps, instead of joining the IAF fleet.

MALDHARI COMMUNITY

- Maldharis are a tribal herdsman community settled in the Banni grasslands of Gujarat.
- Among many other animals, they rear the much talked about Kharai camels.
- They co-exist with the Gir Lion and the Gir Forest National Park is home to around 8,400 Maldharis.

About Kharai Camels:

- Kharai Camels or Swimming Camels are found only in Gujarat's Rann of Kutch.
- They can live in both coastal and dry ecosystems.
- It grazes on saline/mangrove trees and is tolerant to high saline water.
- It can swim up to three kilometers into the sea in search of mangroves, their primary food.

About Banni grassland:

- It is the arid grassland ecosystem present in the Rann of Kutch region of Gujarat.
- It is the largest natural grassland in the Indian subcontinent.
- It is predominantly inhabited by Maldhari nomadic community.
- It has been identified as one of the last remaining habitats of the cheetah in India.

JAPAN TESTS WORLD'S FASTEST BULLET TRAIN

Japan has started testing its fastest-ever bullet train capable of reaching 400 kilometres per hour (249 mph) as it continues to develop the revolutionary mode of travel.

The ALFA-X version of the Shinkansen train began three years' worth of test. Once it enters operation sometime around 2030, it will run at speeds of up to 360 kph (224 mph), comfortably making it the world's fastest bullet train.

It will also outpace China's Fuxing train, which runs at 10 kph slower despite being designed with the same top speed capabilities as the ALFA-X.

The model's futuristic design features 10 cars and a long pointed nose. It'll be tested on the line between the cities of Sendai and Aomori, which are about 280 kilometres apart as the crow flies. Tests will take place after midnight when the line is quiet and will occur twice a week.

The ALFA-X marks a new stage of growth for the Shinkansen, pushing the world-renowned high-speed rail service even faster towards the future.

Its testing debut comes as Japan's new high-speed Shinkansen N700S continues tests that began just over a year ago.

That model will enter operation in 2020, but its maximum speeds of 300 kph the same as other N700 series trains will be easily surpassed by the ALFA-X.

The flurry of new models coincides with Japan's preparations to host the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo.

No matter what speeds the train achieves during its test runs, it won't match the record-breaking pace of Japan Railway's magnetic levitation, or maglev, a train which hit 603 kph (374 mph) on an experimental track in 2015.



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