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29 January 2024

National & International News

Laughing gull (Leucophaeus atricilla)



First-Time Sighting in the Country:

- Laughing gull, a migratory bird from **North America**, was discovered for the first time in the country.
- Sightings reported at the **Chittari estuary in Kasaragod district**.

Key Points:

- Known for **unique laughter-like calls**, the laughing gull traveled thousands of kilometers from North America to the **coastal region of Kerala**.

Identification Amidst Diverse Avian Population:

- Smaller than the **brown-headed gull**, with distinctive features such as a **dark upper part, black legs, long drooping bill, and a dark smudge on the back of the head**.

Contribution to India's Bird Species Count:

- The discovery elevates the total number of bird species found in India to **1,367**.
- Kasaragod district contributes **400 species** to the state's overall count of **554**.

Conservation Status:

- **Least Concern (LC) on the IUCN Red List**, as the species has a large and stable population.

ISRO's INSAT-3DS Satellite

Context:

- The INSAT-3DS satellite flagged off at the launch port at **Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota** by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).
- Scheduled to be launched on board **GSLV F14** next month.

Objectives and Significance:

- Exclusive meteorological satellite designed to provide **continuity of services to existing INSAT-3D and 3DR satellites (which aid in weather monitoring)**
- Aims to significantly enhance the capabilities of the **INSAT system**.



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Advanced Payloads:

- State-of-the-art payloads include a **six-channel imager and 19-channel sounder meteorology payloads.**
- Communication payloads, a **data relay transponder (DRT)**, and a **satellite-aided search and rescue (SAS&R) transponder.**
- DRT instrument receives meteorological and oceanographic data, augmenting weather forecasting capabilities.
- SAS&R transponder incorporated for relaying distress signals/alerts, facilitating global search and rescue services.

Nitish Kumar's Ninth Term as Bihar Chief Minister

Context:

- Nitish Kumar, President of Janata Dal (United), took oath as **Bihar Chief Minister for the ninth time.**
- This marks his fifth switch in political alliances since 2015.
- He rejoined the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) after leaving it 18 months ago.

Key Points:

- Alongside Nitish Kumar, six Ministers and two Deputy Chief Ministers **Samrat Choudhary and Vijay Kumar Sinha** from the BJP were sworn in.
- The Cabinet is expected to be expanded further shortly.

Germany seeks an inter-governmental deal for submarines with India



Context:

- Germany presents an **inter-governmental proposal to sell 6 advanced conventional submarines to India.**
- The proposal is part of **India's Navy P-75I procurement program.**
- Discussions were recently held in New Delhi with a senior German delegation.
- The deal, expected to cost over ₹45,000 crore, competes for Germany and Spain.

India's Navy P-75I procurement program

- Planned class of diesel-electric submarines for the Indian Navy.

Project Overview

- It is an acquisition plan for six conventional diesel-electric attack submarines.
- Project mainly emphasizes advanced capabilities, including air-independent propulsion (AIP), ISR, SOF, ASuW, ASW, ASuW, and land-attack capabilities.

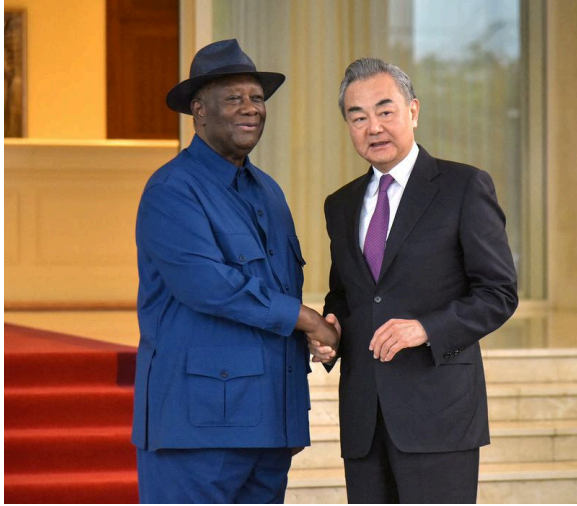


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China's ties with Africa



- All six submarines to be constructed in India.
- **The project aligns with the Make in India initiative**, emphasizing self-sufficiency and indigenous manufacturing in defense projects.

Context:

- Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs, **Wang Yi**, embarked on his **11th annual trip to Africa**, visiting Egypt, Tunisia, Togo, and the Ivory Coast.
- The visit aimed at enhancing economic and security cooperation, implementing outcomes of the **China-Africa Leaders Dialogue in August 2023**.

Key Points:

Purpose of visit:

- Execution of three key initiatives: industrialization support, agricultural modernization, and talent development cooperation.
- Setting the groundwork for the upcoming **Forum on China-Africa Cooperation 2024 (FOCAC)**.
- Mediation efforts for peace in Gaza, specifically addressing the **Rafah border shared with Egypt**.

Why is Africa China's Primary Focus?

- Historical ties dating back to the **1950s**, with China supporting African liberation movements.
- Importance of African support in China **acquiring a UN Security Council seat in the 70s**.
- Evolution from ideological support to the **"Go Out Policy"** encouraging Chinese companies to invest in Africa in 1999.
- Growth of **Sino-African relations through FOCAC dialogues, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**, and strategic military presence.

Objectives of China in Africa:

- Securing access to **crucial resources (cobalt, platinum, coltan)** vital for China's tech industry.
- Strengthening geopolitical alliances with Africa to sway **international resolutions in forums like the UN General Assembly**.
- Promoting the use of the **Chinese Yuan (RMB)** in trade, offering financial incentives, and restructuring African debt.
- Exploiting commercial opportunities through Africa's import of **finished goods, supporting Chinese exports and economy**.



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Concerns and Criticisms:

- Western concerns about predatory Chinese investments, **leading to debt traps**.
- Varied African responses, with some poorly managing debt (**e.g., Kenya, Zambia**) and others benefiting from manageable arrangements.
- Chinese '**non-interference**' stance provides space for African authoritarian regimes to maintain power.

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