

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (DCA)

Time: 45 Min

Date: 06-03-2024

Table of Content

Maratha Quota Law

Maldives Signs Defence Pact with China

Women, Business and the Law 2024 Report

MethaneSAT

NEWS IN SHORT

India's First National Dolphin Research Centre

Shanan Hydropower Project

INS Jatayu

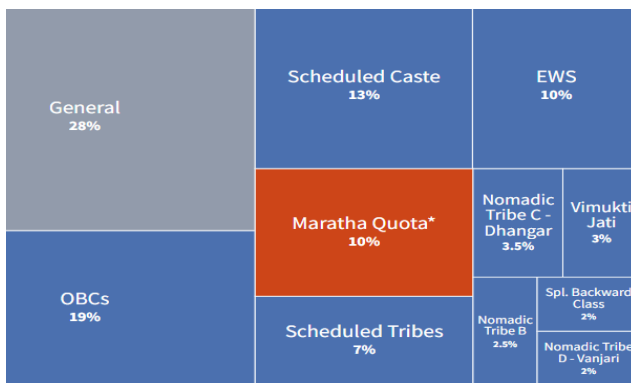
MARATHA QUOTA LAW

Context

- The Maharashtra Assembly unanimously passed a Bill granting 10% reservation in education and government jobs to the Maratha community.

About

- The law has been formulated based on a report of the Justice **Sunil B Shukre**-led Maharashtra State Backward Class Commission.
- It opined that “**exceptional circumstances and extraordinary situations**” justify granting reservation to the community beyond the Supreme Court-approved **50%** limit.



Reservation in India

- As per existing instructions, reservation is provided to Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) at the rate of **15%**, **7.5%** and **27%**, respectively, in case of direct recruitment on all India basis by open competition.
 - In direct recruitment on an all India basis, other than by open competition, the percentage fixed is 16.66% for SCs, 7.5% for STs and 25.84% for OBCs.
- The Constitution (103rd Amendment) Act 2019 enables the State (i.e., both the Central and State Governments) to provide reservation to the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) of the society.
 - Whether or not to provide reservation to the EWS or appointment in States is to be decided by the State Government.
- Since the 1992 order, several states have passed laws breaching the 50% ceiling, including Haryana, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra.
 - Laws made by many of these states have either stayed or are facing legal challenges.

Constitutional Provisions

- Article 16:** It provides for equality of opportunity for all citizens but as an exception the State can provide for reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class that is not adequately represented in the state services.
- Article 16 (4A):** Provides that the State can make any provision for reservation in matters of promotion in favor of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes if they are not adequately represented in the services under the State.
- Article 335:** It recognises that special measures need to be adopted for considering the claims of SCs and STs to services and posts, in order to bring them at par.
- 103 Amendment of the Constitution of India:** Introduced 10% reservation for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) of society by amending Article 15 and Article 16 of the Constitution.

Arguments in Favour

- Caste-based reservations address the roots of social injustice — and shouldn't be replaced by economic status-based reservations.
- The Constitution mandates realization of substantive equality in the engagement of the fundamental rights with the directive principles.
- It is a stereotypical assumption that the promotions drawn from the SCs and STs are not efficient or that efficiency is reduced by appointing them.
- The main reason for giving reservations and even promotions is that there are very few SC/ST candidates in the higher echelons of government.

Argument Against

- Reservations discourage merit and genuine talent by providing an unfair advantage to reserved candidates.
- Many deem poverty to be eligible for reservations in education and employment over caste-based marginalization.
- Reservations should only exist to level the playing field initially; they should be discontinued for higher positions/promotions.
- Economically well-off members of marginalized communities should not avail benefits of reservation.
- Low-cutoffs and eligibility criteria for reserved candidates brings down the overall caliber of an institution or organization.

- Continued reservation in education and public service were only a temporary measure.

Way ahead

- Allocating quotas often result in more cases of discrimination and hard feelings towards other communities. The purpose of reservation is not to isolate a particular section but to make them part of mainstream society.
- The policy makers while dealing with sensitive matters like Reservation policies must act wisely.

Indira Sawhney judgment

- The Indira Sawhney case is also known as the **Mandal Commission** case. In this case, the Supreme Court stated that:
 - Backward Classes of the Citizens of in **Article 16(4)** can be identified on the basis of caste and not only on the economic basis.
 - The Supreme Court upheld the **Mandal Commission's 27 percent quota** for backward classes, as well as the principle that the combined scheduled-caste, scheduled-tribe, and backward-class beneficiaries should not exceed 50 percent of India's population.
 - Reservation for backward classes should be confined to initial appointments only and not extend to promotions.
 - State governments were called upon to identify creamy layer amongst the backward classes and exclude them from the purview of reservation.

Source: TH

MALDIVES SIGNS DEFENCE PACT WITH CHINA

In Context

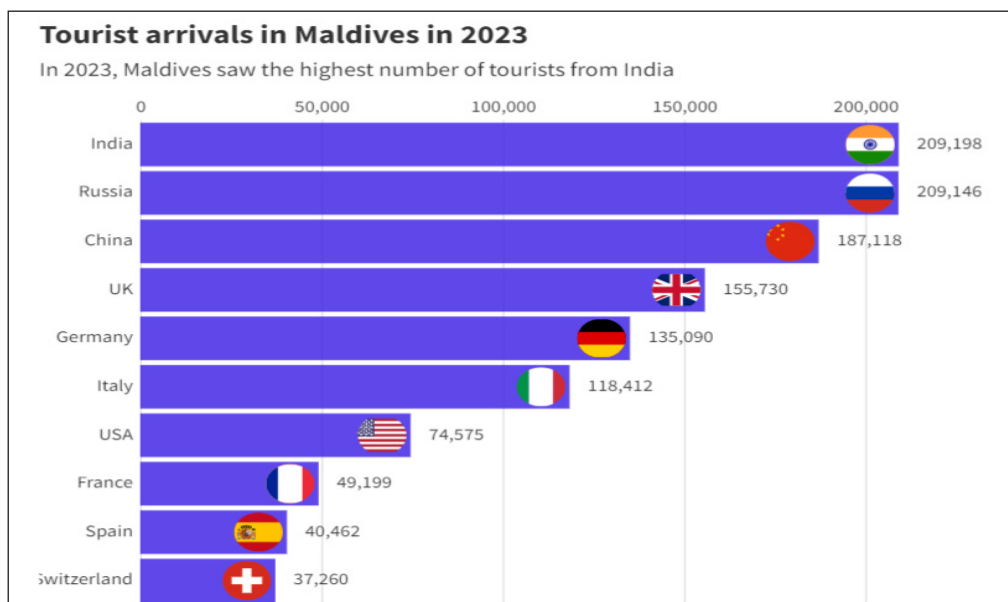
- Days after a technical team from India arrived in the Maldives, to replace troops that President Mohamed Muizzu wanted removed, the **Maldivian Defence Ministry announced signing a military pact with China.**

About:

- They signed an agreement on **“China’s provision of military assistance grants to the Republic of Maldives, fostering stronger bilateral ties”.**
- Further, **China donated 12 green ambulances to the Maldives’s Health Ministry.**
- The development is in line with the two countries agreeing to **“elevate” China-Maldives relations to a “comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership”**, during Mr. Muizzu’s five-day state visit to China in January, 2024.

Recent Maldives-India row:

- The latest trigger has been **undiplomatic words used by ministers in Maldives** against Prime Minister Narendra Modi in particular and Indians in general.
- The new government led by President Mohamed Muizzu **asked India to withdraw military personnel** and **chose China for one of his first overseas visits.**
- Maldives President Muizzu in his visit also **urges China to reclaim top spot in tourist arrivals** which was dominated by India in the last few years.



- The incumbent government rode to power on an **'India Out' poll campaign**.
 - ♦ The release of a report by the **EU Election Observation Mission of Maldives** said, the ruling coalition in Maldives **deployed anti-Indian sentiments and attempted to spread disinformation in the 2023 presidential elections** in which Mr. Muizzu won.
- Maldives has also decided **not to renew the agreement with India on a hydrographic survey** of its waters.
 - ♦ The agreement, signed on June 8, 2019, **allowed India to conduct a hydrographic survey of the Maldivian territorial waters**, study and chart reefs, lagoons, coastlines, ocean currents and tide levels.

Historical context:

- **Pre-colonial ties:** Trade and cultural exchange flourished between the two regions for centuries, forging deep and enduring social connections.
- **Colonial era and independence:** While both nations underwent colonization (Maldives by the British, India by the British and Portuguese), they maintained close links and mutual support during their independence struggles.
- **Post independence:** After the **British relinquished control of the islands in 1965**, India established diplomatic ties.
- **Under the Maritime Boundary Treaty of 1976**, Maldives has recognized Minicoy as an integral part of India.
- While there was no diplomatic mission in Male earlier (**it was run by the Indian High Commission in Colombo till 1978**), **since 1980 India has had an ambassadorial representative** in the islands.
- After the **democratic transition took place in 2008**, India has built deep relationships with all relevant stakeholders, players in politics, military, business, and civil society.

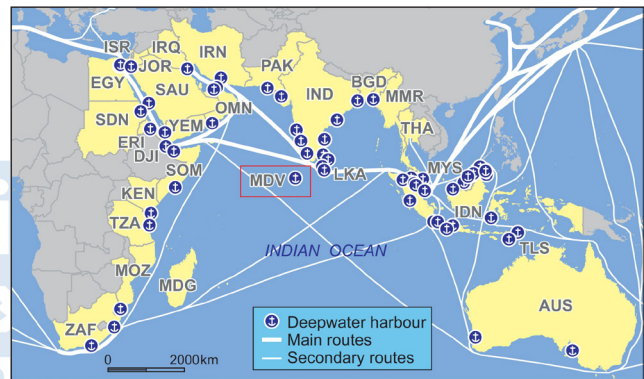
Significance of Maldives for India:

Geostrategic Importance:

- **Location:** Maldives' proximity to the west coast of India (barely 70 nautical miles from Minicoy and 300 nautical miles from India's West coast).



- **Trade and commerce:** Situated along **crucial maritime trade routes** between the Gulf of Aden and the Strait of Malacca, the **Maldives acts as a "toll gate" for nearly half of India's external trade and 80% of its energy imports**.



- **Maritime Security:** Maldives is one of the key elements in India's maritime security calculus. A stable and friendly Maldives ensures regional security and maritime stability, mitigating threats like piracy and terrorism.
- **Counterbalancing China:** Maldives presents an opportunity for India to counterbalance China's growing influence in the Indian Ocean, fostering regional balance of power.

Economic and Political Connections:

- **Strong cultural and historical ties:** The Maldives and India share close cultural and historical links, fostering deeper understanding and cooperation.
- **Economic partnership:** India is one of the biggest investors and tourism markets for the Maldives, with significant trade and infrastructure projects underway.

Additional Advantages:

- **Climate change resilience:** Collaborating with the Maldives on climate change mitigation and adaptation is crucial for both countries as vulnerable nations.

- **Defence:** The reason why India invests in Maldives' security by training its defence forces is with a **view to keep an eye on the activities in the Indian Ocean**.
 - ♦ Estimates suggest that almost **70 per cent of Maldives' defence training is done by India** — either on the islands or in India's elite military academies.

Significance of India for Maldives:

- **Daily needs:** India supplies Maldives with its everyday essentials: rice, spices, fruits, vegetables, poultry, medicines and life-saving drugs.
 - ♦ India also supplies **basic items to build infrastructure** in Maldives — cement, rock boulders.
- **Education:** India has been the education provider for Maldivians. Since the country has a small population base and the islands are isolated and spread out, there are no major educational institutions. So, every year, Maldivian students come to Indian higher educational institutions.
- **Economic dependence:** Of the Rs 50 crore total trade between India and Maldives in 2022, **Rs 49 crore was India's exports to Maldives**. India emerged as Maldives' second largest trade partner in 2022.
- **Help during disasters:** India has been the main pillar of help for Maldives in times of crisis and distress. When a tsunami struck the islands in 2004, India was the first to send in help.
 - ♦ **Again, in 2014, when Male suddenly had a drinking water crisis** as the major desalination plant broke down, India overnight airlifted drinking water to the islands.
 - ♦ **During the Covid-19 pandemic**, India sent essential medicines, masks, gloves, PPE kits and vaccines for the island country.
- **Security provider:** When there was a coup attempt in 1988 against the then President Abdul Gayoom, India sent in troops to fight the combatants.

Challenges:

Political Instability

- **Domestic turmoil in the Maldives:** Recent political upheavals and changes in government can create uncertainty and complicate long-term cooperation projects.

Chinese Influence

- **Economic and infrastructure investments:** China's growing economic presence in

the Maldives, evidenced by investments in infrastructure projects and debt-trap diplomacy, can be perceived as a challenge to India's strategic interests in the region.

- **Military ambitions:** Chinese naval expansion and potential military ambitions in the Indian Ocean with the active support from Maldives can raise concerns for India.

Security Concerns:

- **Non-traditional threats:** Piracy, terrorism, and drug trafficking remain concerns in the region, requiring continuous collaboration and intelligence sharing between India and the Maldives.
- **Extremism and radicalization:** The Maldives' vulnerability to religious extremism and radicalization poses a security threat that necessitates joint efforts in countering such ideologies.

Economic and Environmental Concerns:

- **Trade imbalance:** The significant trade imbalance between India and the Maldives could lead to resentment and calls for diversifying trade partnerships.
- **Impact of climate change:** Both nations are highly vulnerable to climate change and rising sea levels, requiring coordinated efforts for adaptation and environmental protection.

Misperception and communication gap

- **Lack of direct communication channels** can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations between the two countries.
- **Influence of domestic pressure groups:** Domestic pressure groups or vested interests in both countries can sometimes hinder cooperative initiatives or sow discord in the relationship.

Overcoming the challenges:

- **Open and transparent communication:** Regular dialogue at all levels can address concerns and build trust.
- **Focus on common interests:** Prioritizing areas like maritime security, climate change, and economic development can solidify the foundation of the partnership.
- **Respect for sovereignty and non-interference:** Both countries must respect each other's internal affairs and avoid interference in domestic politics.
- **Strengthening people-to-people ties:** Cultural exchange programs and educational collaborations can foster deeper understanding and empathy.

- **Addressing internal issues:** Both India and the Maldives need to address domestic challenges like corruption and instability to project a positive image and foster a stable partnership.

Way Ahead:

- In this recent context, it is in the interest of both New Delhi and Male to dial down the current tensions, **by assuaging each other's concerns and cooperating on what matters most for both sides.**
- By acknowledging and addressing these challenges, India and the Maldives can **navigate the complexities of their relationship and build a stronger, more resilient, and mutually beneficial partnership** for the future.

Source: TH

WOMEN, BUSINESS AND THE LAW 2024 REPORT

In Context

- **Women, Business and the Law 2024 report** was released by the **World Bank.**

About

- It is the 10th in a series of annual studies measuring the **laws that affect women's economic opportunity in 190 economies.**
- It measures women's economic participation in – **mobility, workplace, pay, marriage, parenthood, entrepreneurship, assets, and pensions.**
- The data offer **objective and measurable benchmarks for global progress** toward gender equality.

Major Findings

- **Legal Rights to Women:** Women enjoy **less than two-thirds or 64 percent of the** of the legal rights available to men.
 - ♦ The lower number reflects the major deficiencies in **Safety and Childcare.**
 - ♦ Deficiencies in these areas **discourage women from entering the global workforce.**
- **Pay:** Women earn just **77 cents for every dollar** paid to men.
 - ♦ In all, 92 economies lack provisions mandating equal pay for work of equal value; 20 prohibit a woman from working at night; and 45 prohibit a woman from working in jobs deemed dangerous.

- **Entrepreneurship:** Globally, only **44 percent** of the legal provisions that support the entrepreneurship of women are in place.
 - ♦ Across the world, women hold just **one out of every five corporate board positions.**
- **Nationality Rights:** In 28 economies, a woman **cannot pass her nationality to children in the same way as a man.**
 - ♦ In 50 economies, a woman does not enjoy an equal right to confer citizenship on her foreign spouse.
 - ♦ Such discriminatory provisions in nationality laws harm a woman's economic opportunities, limiting her inheritance and property rights and employment opportunities.
- **Retirement:** In 62 economies, the age at which men and women can retire is not the same, with **women retiring earlier than men.**
 - ♦ In 81 economies, a woman's pension benefits do not account for periods of work absences related to childcare.
- **Significance of Women Participation:** In an era of persistently slow growth, increasing the participation of women in the global workforce could **significantly brighten the outlook.**
 - ♦ Closing the gender gap in employment and entrepreneurship could raise the **global gross domestic product by more than 20 percent.**
 - ♦ Eliminating the gender gap over the next decade would **essentially double the current global growth rate.**

How did India Perform?

- **Ranking:** India's rank has marginally improved to 113, with a score of **74.4 percent.**
 - ♦ The score has remained constant since 2021, but the ranking witnessed a **decline from 122 in 2021 to 125 in 2022** and further **to 126 in the 2023 index.**
- **Legal Rights:** Indian women have just **60 percent of the legal rights** compared to men, slightly **below the global average of 64.2 percent.**
 - ♦ **India outperformed its South Asian counterparts,** where women have only 45.9 percent of the legal protections enjoyed by men.
- **Pay Gap:** India receives one of its lowest scores in the indicator evaluating laws impacting women's pay.
 - ♦ To enhance this aspect, India could explore measures such as mandating equal pay for equivalent work, permitting women to work at

night on par with men and enabling women to engage in industrial jobs on an equal footing with men.

- **Supportive Frameworks:** India scored higher than both the global and South Asian averages. The lowest indicator in frameworks **was childcare**.
 - ♦ The report recommended creating a publicly accessible registry or database of childcare providers and implementing a well-defined application process for parents seeking government financial support for childcare services, among others.

Recommendations as per the Report

- Accelerate efforts to reform laws and enact public policies that empower women to work and start a business.
- Improve laws related to women's safety, access to childcare, and business opportunities.
- Establish frameworks that support the effective implementation of laws promoting gender equality.
- Enact legal reforms that mandate equal pay for work of equal value, and lift restrictions on a woman's ability to work in industrial jobs.
- Expand maternity and paternity leave provisions, and prohibit the firing of pregnant women.
- Prohibit sexual harassment in the workplace, in public spaces, in education, and online.
- Provide financial support for parents with young children, and establish quality standards for childcare services.
- Implement legally binding quotas for women on corporate boards, and mandate gender-sensitive criteria for public procurement processes.
- Ensure equal retirement benefits for women, accounting for periods of work absences related to childcare.

Source: DTE

METHANESAT

In Context

- **MethaneSAT**, a new satellite backed by **Alphabet Inc's Google** and the Environmental Defense Fund group, was launched recently.

About

- The satellite **will track and measure methane emissions** at a global scale and was launched aboard a SpaceX Falcon9 rocket from California.

- It is not the first spacecraft to identify and quantify methane emissions, it will provide **more details** and have a **much wider field of view** than any of its predecessors.

Methane Emissions and Need to Track it

- **Contribution of Methane Gas:** Methane is **an invisible but strong greenhouse gas**, and the **second largest contributor** to global warming after carbon dioxide, responsible for **30 percent of global heating** since the Industrial Revolution.
 - ♦ According to the United Nations Environment Programme, **over a period of 20 years**, methane is **80 times more potent** at warming than carbon dioxide.
- **Formation of Ground level Ozone:** The gas also contributes to the **formation of ground-level ozone — a colourless and highly irritating gas** that forms just above the Earth's surface.
 - ♦ Exposure to ground-level ozone could be **contributing to one million premature deaths every year**.
- **Major Contributor:** The main reason is fossil fuel operations, which account for about **40 percent** of all human-caused methane emissions.
- Therefore, it is **crucial to cut methane emissions** and the **objective of MethaneSAT** is to help achieve this goal.

About MethaneSAT

- It is developed by the **Environmental Defense Fund (EDF)**—a US-based nonprofit environmental advocacy group with Harvard University, the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory, and the New Zealand Space Agency.
- **MethaneSAT will orbit the Earth 15 times a day**, monitoring the oil and gas sector.
- **Specifications:** It can track **differences in methane concentrations** as small as three parts per billion in the atmosphere, which enables it to pick up smaller emissions sources than the previous satellites.
 - ♦ MethaneSAT also has a wide-camera view of about 200 km by 200 km allowing it to identify larger emitters so-called **“super emitters”**.
- **Tracking and Data Creation:** It will create a **large amount of data** to disclose how much methane is coming from where, who's responsible, and are those emissions going up or down over time.
 - ♦ The collected data will be analysed using cloud-computing and AI technology developed by Google — the company is a mission partner — and the **data will be made**

public through Google's Earth Engine platform.

- **Significance:** This will allow stakeholders and regulators to take action to reduce methane emissions.

Source: IE

NEWS IN SHORT

INDIA'S FIRST NATIONAL DOLPHIN RESEARCH CENTRE

In News

- India's first centre for research on conserving the **endangered Gangetic river dolphin** was inaugurated in Patna, Bihar.
 - ♦ Bihar is home to around half of the estimated 3,000 **Gangetic dolphins in India**.

Objective

- The NDRC seeks to serve as a **central hub for research** on diverse facets of Gangetic dolphins, including studies on their behavior, survival mechanisms, and factors contributing to mortality.

Ganges River Dolphins (also called 'susu')

- **Scientific Name:** Platanista Gangetica .
- **Discovery:** Officially discovered in 1801.
- **Habitat and Distribution:** Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers & their tributaries in India, Bangladesh and Nepal.
- **Characteristics:** Only live in freshwater & does not have a crystalline eye lens, rendering it effectively blind.
 - ♦ Navigation and hunting through a highly developed '**sonar system**', using **echolocation (ultrasonic sounds)**.
 - ♦ The body is a brownish colour and stocky in the middle.
 - ♦ They are usually found in **turbulent waters**, where there are enough fish for them to feed on.
 - ♦ Gangetic dolphins live in a zone where there is little or no current, helping them save energy.
- **Significance:**
 - ♦ Indicator of the health of the entire river ecosystem.
 - ♦ Controlling and maintaining healthy fish and crustacean populations

- ♦ GOI was declared **National Aquatic Animal in 2009**.

- **Threats:** Habitat degradation via pollution, construction etc.
 - ♦ Accidental deaths via entanglement in the nets (bycatch), Poaching.
- **Conservation Status:** Endangered (IUCN), Schedule I of Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
 - ♦ Appendix I of CITES

Steps Taken

- **Project Dolphin:** Conservation of dolphins & aquatic habitat through the use of technology (Pollution reduction & sustainable fishery).
- **National Dolphin Day:** October 5th has been designated as National Dolphin Day to be celebrated every year to create awareness for conservation of Dolphins.
- **Dolphin Sanctuary:** Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary (VGDS) (Bihar)
- **Conservation Action Plan for Dolphins:** By the Wildlife Institute of India launched in 2016.

Source: DTE

SHANAN HYDROPOWER PROJECT

In Context

- The Union Government ordered that **status quo** be maintained on the **Shanan hydropower project**, over which **Punjab and Himachal Pradesh have made competing claims**.

About

- It is a **British-era 110-MW hydel project**, situated at **Jogindernagar in Mandi district of Himachal Pradesh**, which was **leased to Punjab in 1925**.
- The lease agreement was signed between the **then ruler of Mandi**, Raja Joginder Bahadur, and a British representative and Chief Engineer of Punjab. **The 99-year-old lease came to an end on March 2**.
- In the past few years, **Himachal has contended** that the **project should stay with it once the lease ends**.

Source: IE

INS JATAYU

Context

- The Indian Navy commissioned a new base INS Jatayu on Minicoy Island.

About

- The move aims to bolster security infrastructure at the strategically crucial Lakshadweep Islands.
- Minicoy is the southernmost island of Lakshadweep which straddles the vital **Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs)**.
- INS Jatayu is the second Naval base in Lakshadweep after **INS Dweep prakshak** in **Kavaratti**.
- The islands have a total land area of just 32 sq km but confer a 400,000-sq kms Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).
- The capital is **Kavaratti**.

Lakshadweep Archipelago

- Lakshadweep is an archipelago of **36 islands** that are located some **400 km** to the west of Kerala.
- It is a uni-district Union Territory and comprises **12 atolls**, three reefs, five submerged banks and **10 inhabited islands**.
- It is divided into three island subgroups:
 - ♦ The **Laccadive Islands** in the middle with the **Amindivi Islands** in the north separated by the **11th parallel north** and
 - ♦ The **atoll of Minicoy** to the south separated to **Laccadive Islands** by the **Nine Degree Channel**.



Source: MINT



