



Rapid Fire Current Affairs

NGT Imposes Penalty on Kerala Govt. for Failing to Protect Ramsar Sites

The [National Green Tribunal \(NGT\)](#) has imposed a penalty of **Rs 10 crore on the Kerala government** for failing to protect two wetlands, **Vembanad** and [Ashtamudi lakes](#), which are included in the [Ramsar list of wetlands](#). The wetlands have become polluted due to the **dumping of pharmaceutical waste, plastic waste, household waste**, and slaughterhouse waste.

Vembanad, Kerala's largest wetland ecosystem was designated as a Ramsar site back in 2002. According to a recent study by the **Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies, Vembanad lake's water retention capacity has decreased by 85%** in the last 120 years due to encroachment and devastation of its ecology.

Ashtamudi lake, home to several plant and bird species, was included in the **Ramsar list in August 2002**. Since then, little has been done to safeguard the site which is currently experiencing a **notable build-up of waste**.

The **Kerala Legislative Assembly's Environment Committee** has listed several proposals, including the formation of the **Ashtamudi Wetland Management Authority**, to protect the site. It recommended **immediate regulations to control unlawful demolition and dumping of boats in the lake** and directed the [state pollution control board](#) to **check the coliform bacteria and oxygen levels** in the lake every three months.

Read More: [Ramsar Sites](#).

Saudi Arabia Joins Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a Dialogue Partner

Saudi Arabia has approved to join the [Shanghai Cooperation Organization \(SCO\)](#) as a dialogue partner.

The **SCO was formed in 2001** by Russia, China, and former Soviet states in Central Asia, and has since expanded to **include India and Pakistan**. It aims to play a bigger role as a **counterweight to Western influence in the region**.

Iran also signed documents for full membership in 2022. The **dialogue partner status** for Saudi Arabia will be a first step within the organisation before **granting the kingdom full membership** in the mid-term.

Countries belonging to the organisation plan to hold a joint **"counter-terrorism exercise"** in Russia's **Chelyabinsk region in August 2023**.

Indian Coast Guard's Regional Search and Rescue Exercise

The [Indian Coast Guard](#) recently conducted a **Regional Search and Rescue exercise** in **Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh**, to simulate a **real-time maritime distress scenario** and highlight the functioning of the Search and Rescue organization (SAR) for a mass rescue operation.

The exercise involved all stakeholders and effectively used available resources towards [Maritime Search and Rescue contingency](#) efficiently.

Sea area off Kakinada was chosen as the venue for the exercise **considering the large-scale exploration and production activities in the [Krishna Godavari basin](#)** which makes the area potential for emergencies necessitating large scale SAR response.

Read More: [Indian Coast Guard](#)

Upward Lightning

Researchers in Brazil have captured images of "**upward lightning**" or "**upward flashes**".

This phenomenon occurs when a **self-initiated lightning streak** develops from a tall object and **travels upward towards an electrified storm cloud**. The phenomenon **requires storm electrification and the presence of a cloud charge** region.

The vertical elevation of a tall object emphasises the electric field locally on the ground, resulting in **conditions favourable for the initiation of an upward streak** from a tall object.

The process is also triggered by the **development of a stepped leader**, which is a channel of **negative charge that travels downward in a zigzag pattern from a cloud**, leading to an **intensification of the positive charge on the ground**.

The negatively charged, **downward-moving stepped leader makes contact with one of the developing positively charged upward streamers, completing the lightning channel**, and causing charges to flow rapidly from the cloud towards the ground.

Read More: [Lightning Streak](#)

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