



TARGET PRELIMS 2026 / PMP 2026

INTERNATIONAL MAPPING AND PLACES IN NEWS-2

CENTRAL ASIA, INDIAN OCEAN REGION, WEST ASIA

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Levelup IAS

2. CENTRAL ASIA

- **Region:** In modern context Central Asia includes the following five republics of former Soviet Union. They all became independent in 1991 after the fall of USSR.
 - » Kazakhstan (Astana (now called **Nur Sultan**))
 - » Kyrgyzstan (Bishkek)
 - » Tajikistan (Dushanbe)
 - » Turkmenistan (Ashgabat)
 - » Uzbekistan (Tashkent)
- **The Great Game and Central Asia:** Traditionally, Central Asia has been an arena of great game. The modern version is being played out even today. Russia, China, US, Turkey, Iran, Europe, EU, Japan, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan all have substantial security and economic stakes in the region.



1) ARAL SEA

The Aral sea is situated in Central Asia, between the southern part of Kazakhstan and Northern Uzbekistan.

Till 1960s, it was the world's fourth largest saline lake (after Caspian, Balkash (Kazakhstan), Turkana (Kenya, Ethiopia)).

Two important rivers that feed into the lake are Syr Darya and Amu Darya rivers, reaching the sea through north and south respectively.

- Until the 1960s, the two rivers accounted for around 75-80% of the water supplied to the lake (rest was rainfall).

In 1960s, USSR decided to divert these rivers for irrigation purpose which has led to drastic reduction in the size of the sea.

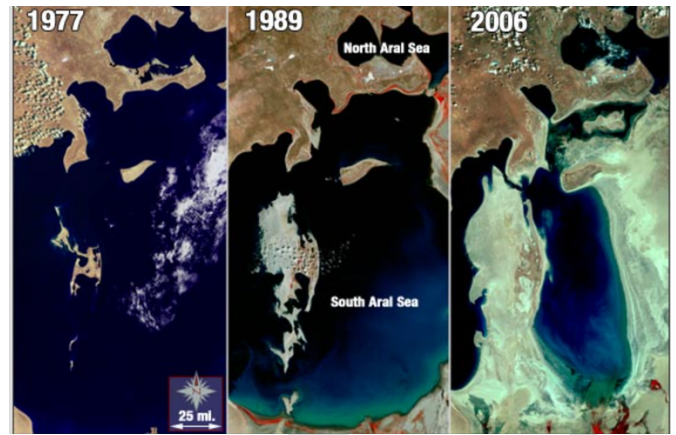
Impact:

- The size of the lake has declined to less than 10% of its original size.



- Increase in salinity (lakes salinity level is risen from 10 gram/l to over 100 g/l);
- Death of marine species such as barbell, carps etc. (due to reducing water levels and salinity);

Restoration Strategy: The five central Asian countries adopted the **Aral Sea Basin Program** in 1994 as part of the restoration strategy. The program aimed to stabilize the basin's environment, rehabilitate the area around the sea, and improve the lake's water management.



3. INDIAN OCEAN REGION

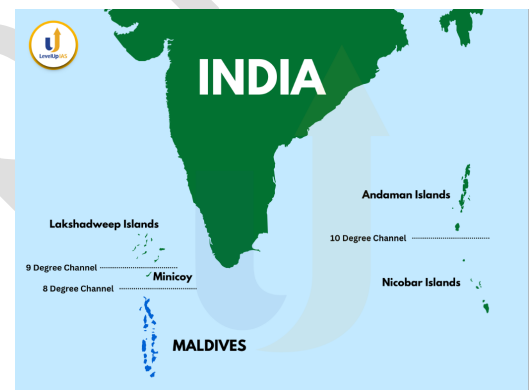
1) 8 DEGREE LINE, 9 DEGREE LINE AND 10 DEGREE LINE

Note:

The **eight degree line** separates the islands of Minicoy and Maldives.

The **nine degree line** separates the island of Minicoy from the main Lakshadweep archipelago.

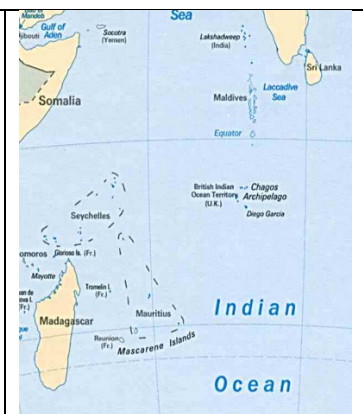
The **10 degree Channel** separates the Andaman Islands and the Nicobar Islands from each other in Bay of Bengal.



2) MALDIVES, MAURITIUS AND SEYCHELLES

MALDIVES

- It is an archipelagic state in the Indian-subcontinent of Asia, situated in Indian ocean.
- It is located southwest of India and Sri Lanka about 750 km from Asian continent's mainland.
- The chain of **26 atolls** stretches from Ihavandhippolhu Atoll in the north to Addu Atoll in the south (Across the Equator)
- **Capital:** Male (also called King's Island)
- The Maldives archipelago is located on Chagos-Laccadive ridge, a vast submarine mountain range in the Indian Ocean;
- With an average ground level of 1.5 metres, and a highest natural point of only 5.1 meters, it is the world's lowest lying country.



THILLAFUSHI ISLAND

- It is an artificial island created by a government decision in 1991 as a municipal landfill situated to the west of Male.
- Landfill eventually led to creation of land mass which has been leased to businesses for commercial activities.
- **In 2015**, government decided to relocate the central commercial port from Male to Thillafushi.
- **Concerns:**
 - » **Toxic Bomb:** Environmentalist describe the island to be toxic bomb due to a lot of unsegregated waste already dumped at the site.
- **News:** The state-owned Maldives Port Limited is proceeding with the US\$ 255 million port development project on the artificial island (July 2025)
- **News:** India's decision to provide support to develop the proposed Thilafushi port in the Indian Ocean archipelago nation (Oct 2025)

ADDU ATOLL AND ADDU CITY

- **About Addu City:** It is a city in Maldives that consists of the inhabited islands of Addu atoll, the southernmost atoll of the archipelago. It is the second largest urban area of Maldives, in terms of population, and is one of the two urban areas to get the status of "city" other than the capital city
- **India and Addu City:**
 - » In 2021, Union Cabinet of GoI approved opening up of a new Consulate General of India in Addu City, Maldives. This will augment India's diplomatic presence and increase engagement.
 - » It is the hub for India assisted infrastructure.
 - » India has spent more than 200 million dollars, in Addu.
 - » India has partnered with government of Maldives on the Addu Reclamation and Shore Protection Project.
- Maldives occupies an important place in the 'Neighbourhood First Policy' and the 'SAGAR' (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision of the Government of India.

OTHER INDIA MALDIVES RELATED UPDATES

- UPI has been introduced in Maldives. As of Jan 2026 it is fully operational in Maldives

MAURITIUS

With an area of 2,040 sq km, it is one of the smallest countries in the world. It is located in the Indian Ocean, just east of Madagascar.

It is made up of the main island of Mauritius and several outlying islands like Ambre, Est, Cerfs, Benitiers etc. Off the coast of mainland Mauritius, there are nearly a hundred islets and rocks without any human habitation.

About Mauritius Island: It is a volcanic island formed due to volcanic activities around 8 million years ago. However, no volcanic activity has been reported in last 1 lakh years. Much of the island is made up of low-lying grasslands surrounded by towering mountains and rolling hills.



Coral Reef surround the island protecting the land from storms and waves.

Lake Vacoas, is the primary source of water for the islanders. Most of the islands water need is fulfilled by this lake and the three major rivers -> Grand River, South East River and Black River.

Capital: Port Louis

AGALEGA ISLAND

Agalega Islands consist of **two outer islands** located in the Indian Ocean. It is located 1050 km north of Mauritius Island. Agalega is a dependency of Mauritius.

The two islands have a total area of 26 sq km and a native population of about 300 people.

Agalega is run directly by PM of Mauritius through the Prime Minister's Office to the Outer Island Development Corporation (OIDC).

In **Feb 2024**, PM of India, Shri Narendra Modi and Mauritian PM Pravind Jugnauth jointly inaugurated an **airstrip and the St. James Jetty** on North Agalega Island in the Indian Ocean.



CHAGOS ARCHIPELAGO

Chagos Archipelago is located in the Central Indian Ocean (1600 km south of Indian subcontinent).

It is referred by the British as the British Indian Ocean Territory.

It consists of semicircular group, open to east, comprising the Salomon Islands, Peros Banhos atoll, Nelsons Island, the Three Brothers Island, Danger Island, the Egmont Islands, and Diego Garcia Atoll (the largest and the southernmost landmass in the group)

Current Administration: Currently the archipelago is administered by a Commissioner of the Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office in London.

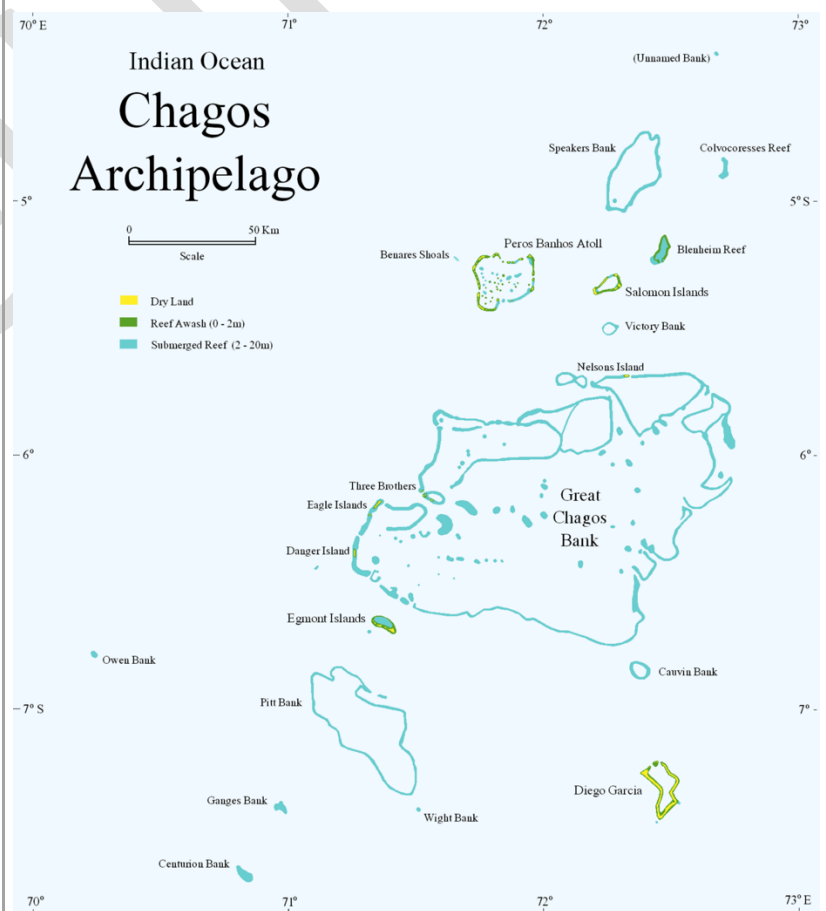
There is no-permanent civilian population on the islands, around 4,000 US and British Military and contract civilian personnel are stationed there.

History and Current Dispute:

- **Uninhabited** till 16th century when Portuguese discovered it.
- **In 18th century** France took control over Chagos Archipelago and Seychelles as dependencies of Mauritius.
- **Early 19th century - British** took over the islands. Mauritius and its dependencies where officially proclaimed a Colony of Britain in 1814 under the Treaty of Paris. Seychelles later got detached from Mauritius and became a separate colony of Britain in 1903.
- **In 1965**, British Indian Ocean Territory for the purpose of Defense and countering Russian influence was created. The territory included Chagos



Location of the Chagos Archipelago (circled)



Archipelago (which was earlier part of Mauritius territory).

- **1971:** A major **US-UK military facility** was built on **Diego Garcia** in 1971.
- Between 1967 and 1973, British removed **Ilois or Chagossians** - inhabited of the Chagos archipelago who were descendants of African slaves and the Indian Plantation workers. They were given a choice of resettlement in either Seychelles or Mauritius which became independent in 1968.
- **In 2000**, British High Court found that **removal of Ilois had been illegal** and allowed them to right to return to any of the islands except Diego Garcia.
- **April 2010:** British government announced its intention to **establish Marine Reserve** covering 5.4 lakh sq km surrounding archipelago. This was **opposed by Chagossians** as when they return back their livelihood will be gone.
- **ICJ in 2019 in an advisory opinion** recommended UK to handover Chagos archipelago to Mauritius.
- **In 2021, ITLOS**, also stated that UK has obligation to return the island to Mauritius.

2024-2025 and 2026:

- A tentative agreement to resolve the dispute was announced in Oct 2024 and the final treaty to transfer the sovereignty to Mauritius was signed in May 2025.
- **The Treaty** awaits primary and secondary legislation before entering into force.
- **2026:** Legislation on Chagos bill paused for discussions with US. Further, Maldives will be lodging a counter-claim to sovereignty over the Chagos Islands in ICJ and urged

government to pause the progress of executing the treaty.

SEYCHELLES

Capital: Victoria

Seychelles, officially the Republic of Seychelles, is an archipelago and country in the India ocean. The 115-island country, whose capital is Victoria, lies 1500 km east of mainland East Africa.

Other nearby islands include: Comoros, Mayotte, Madagascar, Reunion and Mauritius to the south.

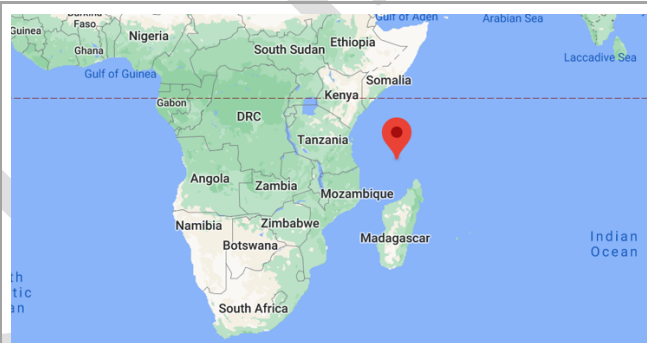
Population: Roughly 93,000, has the smallest population of any independent African state;

ALDABRA ATOLL

Aldabra atoll comprised of four large coral islands which encloses a shallow lagoon; the group of islands is itself surrounded by a coral reef.

- Aldabra atoll is also the world's second-largest coral atoll and is situated in the Aldabra group of islands **in Seychelles** in the Indian Ocean.
- It is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Due to difficulties of access and the atoll's isolation, Aldabra has been protected from human influence and thus retains some 152,000 giant tortoise, the world's largest population of this reptile



4. RUSSIA

RUSSIA

Area: 17 million square km (largest country in the world)

Population: 144 million (9th most populous)

Spans 11 time zones and incorporate a wide range of environments and landforms.

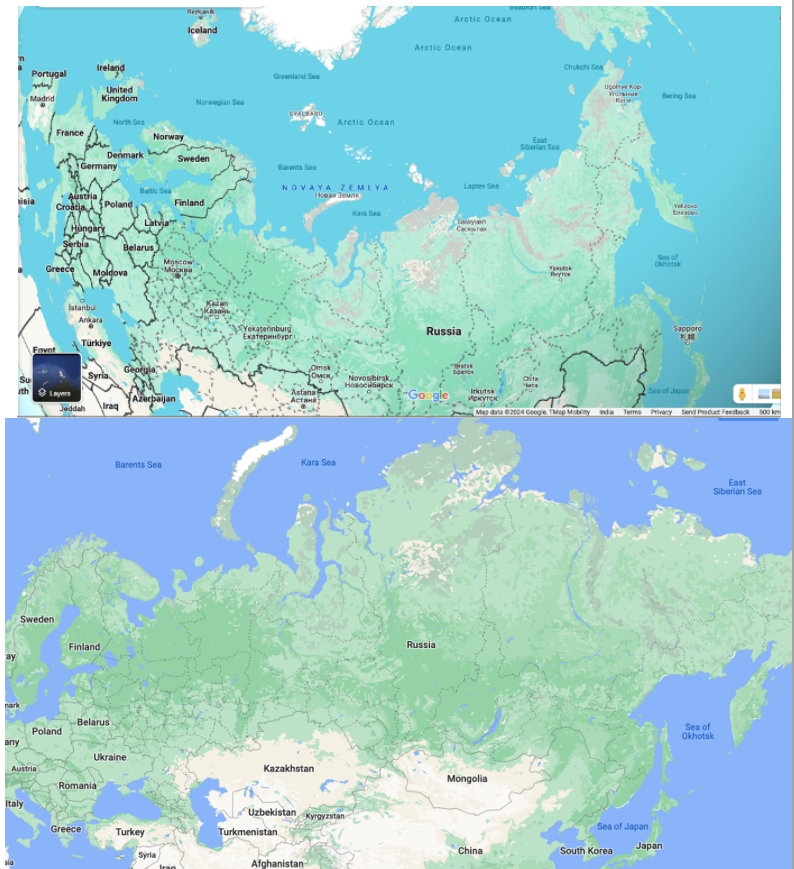
Neighbours : From northwest to Southeast, Russia shares land borders with Norway, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and

Poland(both with Kaliningrad Oblast), Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, China, Mongolia and North Korea.

Maritime borders with Japan (by sea of Okhotsk) and the US state of Alaska across Bering strait.

Water bodies around Russia

White Sea, Barents Sea, Kara Sea, Laptev Sea, East Siberian Sea, Bering Sea, Sea of Okhotsk, Sea of Japan, Caspian Sea, Black Sea and Baltic Sea



LAKE BAIKAL

It's a large rift lake in **Russia**. Lake Baikal is basically a rift valley, created by earth's crust slowly moving apart. In geological term is rift is young and active and widens about 4 mm per year. The fault zone is also seismically active.

It is located in the southern Siberia.

7th largest lake in the world in terms of surface area and the largest in Asia.

It is also the **world's largest freshwater lake in terms of volume of water**. It stores more than 20% of world's fresh surface water. This is more than all the North America's great lake combined.



It is also the **deepest lake (depth of 1640 meters)** in the world. (Lake Tanganyika (1436m); Caspian Sea (1,025 m); Vostok (900 m); Lake Martin (836 m));

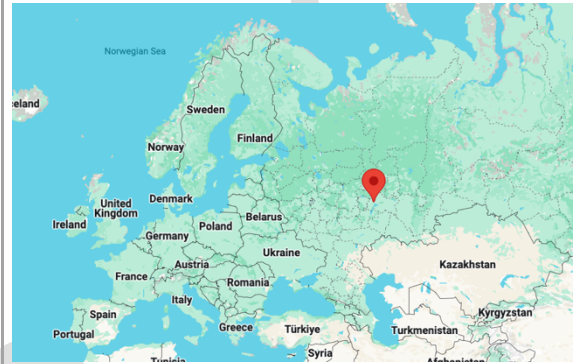
It is also one of the UNESCO's World Heritage Site.

KAZAN

News: 2024 BRICS summit was held in Kazan, Russia.

About the City: Kazan is the capital city of Tatarstan republic, western Russia. It lies north of Samara Reservoir on the Volga River.

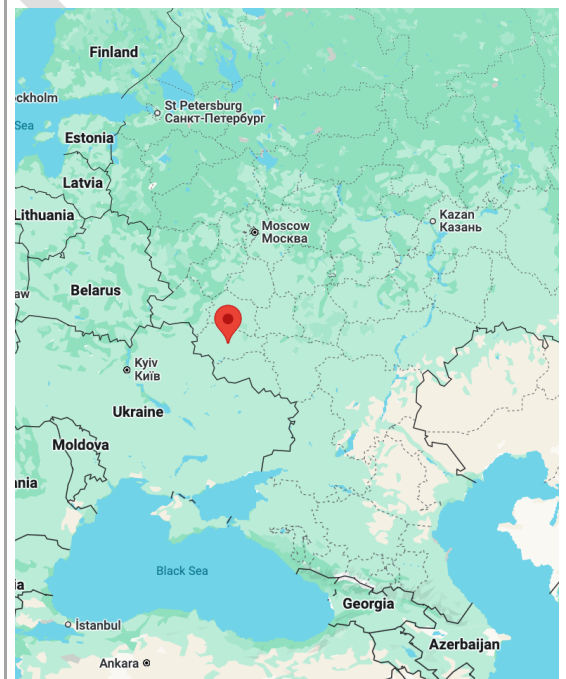
Ancient Kazan was founded in the 13th century by the Mongols (Tatars) of the Golden Horde after the overthrow of the Bulgar kingdom on the middle Volga.



KURSK REGION

Kursk region is in Russia very close to border with Ukraine.

In Aug 2024, Russia declared a "federal level emergency" in the region, following a large scale incursion from Ukraine. This appeared as Kyiv's biggest attack on Russian soil since the war began. It was also the largest attack on Russia since WW-II.



MURMANSK PORT

Murmansk is a seaport located in the Northwestern Russia. It lies 200 km north of Arctic circle and is on the eastern shore of Kola Bay, 48 kms from the ice-free Barents sea.

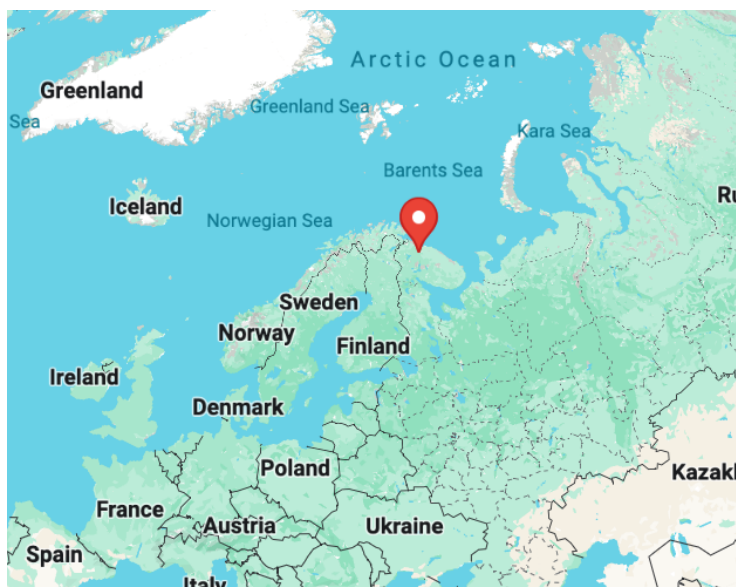
The town was founded in 1915 as a supply port in WW-1. It was a base for the British, French, and American expeditionary forces against the Bolsheviks in 1918.

In WW-2 also the port served as the main port for the **Anglo-American convoys** carrying war supplies to the USSR through Arctic ocean.

Current scenario: Now, it is an important fish port having one of the largest fish processing facilities of Europe. It's ice-free harbour makes it Russia's only port with unrestricted access to the Atlantic and world sea route. From Dec - May it replaces the icebound St. Petersburg as the major port of the northwest. It is connected by railroad to St Petersburg and Moscow.

News: India's engagement with Russia's Arctic region has been strengthening with India-bound goods constituting the maximum share of cargo handled by Murmansk port.

- **Coal** was the main item imported in India from this Russian port.



Note: Kola peninsula is a peninsula in the extreme northwest of Russia, and one of the largest peninsula of Europe. It lies almost completely inside arctic circle and is bordered by Barents sea to the north and White sea to the east and north-east.

F) CHECHNYA

Chechnya (officially the Chechan Republic) is a republic of Russia. It is located in North Caucasus region.

The republic forms a part of the **North Caucasian Federal District**. It is bordered by Russia proper on the north, Dagestan republic on the east and southeast, the country of Georgia on the southwest, and Ingushetia republic on the west.

Insurgency: History

Chechen-Ingush was designated as a republic in 1936.

Secessionist sentiments emerged in 1991 with the disintegration of USSR.



- A coup against local communist government was carried out in 1991, and the coup leader Dzhokhar Dudayey unilaterally declared Chechnya's independence from Russian Federation (subsequently Russia).
- In 1992, Chechnya-Ingushetia divided into **two separate republics** with Ingushetiya favoring Russia and Chechnya leader favoring independence.
- **Russian forces took over the capital of Chechnya (Grozny)** in March 1995 and Dudayey was killed in 1996. A peace treaty was signed in 1997.
- But after a bombing killed scores of civilians in Russia, the then PM Vladimir Putin blamed Chechnya and the Russian forces re-entered Chechnya in 1999.
- Eventually in 2003, Chechan voters approved a new constitution that devolved great powers to the Chechen government, but kept the republic in the federation.
- **In 2004, Russian backed Akhmad Kadyrov** became the President of Chechen. But he was killed in a bomb blast. With Russia's backing in 2006, his son Ramzan Kadyrov, gained the presidency. He had maintained support of Russia and in early 2009 he claimed that insurgency had been crushed.
- As of Feb 2026, Ramzan Kadyrov continues to be President of Chechnya.

Nevertheless, sporadic outbreak of violence including guerrilla attacks continue to occur. In addition, Jihadist group associated with IS exist in the region.

5. CASPIAN SEA

It is located to the east of Caucasus mountains and to the west of Central Asian steppes.

It is the **world's largest inland body of water** (largest salt lake in the world).

An **endorheic basin**, it lies between Europe and Asia; east of the Caucasus, west of the broad steppe of Central Asia, south of the fertile plains of Southern Russia in Eastern Europe, and north of the mountainous Iranian Plateau of Western Asia



The sea is bordered by **Kazakhstan (North-East)**, **Turkmenistan (South-East)**, **Iran (South)**, **Azerbaijan (South West)** and **Russia (North-West)** (Hint: KaTIAR)

Why is Caspian Drying up?

Human made changes: Particularly those resulting from construction of dams, reservoirs, and canals on the **Volga river**, have affected the contemporary hydrology.

Climate Change: It is impacting precipitation in the region and thus the flow of water through Volga river.

Can drying of Caspian impact India?

The destruction of Caspian will be apocalyptic for large parts of Eurasia. But, it will also impact India as Western Disturbance in India originate as local storms over the sea.

Note: Volga river accounts for 80% of the water brought into the Caspian Sea. Therefore, Caspian sea fluctuation are largely determined by the variability of the Volga river flow.

Note: A total of around 130 rivers flow into Caspian sea. But, the Volga, Kura, Terek, and Sulak rivers bring the main volume of runoff to the sea.

6. CAUCASUS REGION

It is a region between Black Sea and the Caspian Sea and mainly occupies **Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Southern Russia**.

It is home to the **Caucasus Mountains** which has been traditionally considered a natural barrier between Eastern Europe and Western Asia.

Europe's Highest Mountain - Mount Elbrus (5,642 meters) (located in Russia) is in the western part of the Greater Caucasus Mountain range.



NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT BETWEEN ARMENIA AND AZERBAIJAN

Straddling western Asia and Eastern Europe, Nagorno-Karabakh is internationally recognised as part of Azerbaijan, but most of the region was controlled by Armenian separatists.

Nagorno-Karabakh has been part of Azerbaijan territory since the Soviet era.

When the Soviet Union began to collapse in the late 1980s, Armenia's regional parliament voted for the region's transfer to Armenia; the Soviet authorities turned down the demand.

Note: Religious differences: People of Ngorno Karabakh are primarily Christians whereas Azerbaijan is Muslim dominate.

Years of clashes followed between Azerbaijan forces and Armenian separatists.

The first Nagorno-Karabakh war ended in 1994 by the Russia brokered ceasefire. But, ethnic Armenians had taken over most of the region and created a Nagorno Karabakh republic.

In 2020, the second Nagorno Karabakh war broke out with an Azerbaijani offensive. After six weeks in **Nov 2020**, Russia brokered a new peace deal between the two nations also stationing a Russian Peacekeeper contingent in Ngorno-Karabakh.

In 2023, Azerbaijan attacked the Armenian separatist forces as part of their anti-terrorist operation and achieved success in forcing Armenian separatists to agree to ceasefire.

This was possible because of the deteriorating relation between Armenia and Russia.

Armenia held military exercise with USA in Sep 2023.

It has also ratified Rome Convention - (ICC) which has indicted Russian President Vladimir Putin.

So, Russia didn't help Armenia this time.



The defeat led to dissolution of the Republic of Artsakh; exodus of almost entire Armenian population from the region and the entering of Azerbaijani security forces in the region. On **1st Jan 2024**, the Republic of Artsakh was formally dissolved, marking the end of a millennia old Armenia presence in Nagorno Karabakh.

In Aug 2025, a US brokered peace deal was signed between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Here Armenia officially recognized Azerbaijan's sovereignty over Ngorno Karabakh. A major provision of the deal includes development of a transit route connecting mainland Azerbaijan to its **exclave, Nakhchivan**, through southern Armenia.

BAKU

It is the capital city of Azerbaijan and is the largest city on the Caspian Sea.

It is located 28 meters below sea level and is thus the lowest lying capital in the world and the largest city in the world below sea level.

COP29 of the UNFCCC was hosted by Azerbaijan at its capital Baku in Nov-Dec 2024.



GEORGIA:

A country in Caucasus region (between eastern Europe and West Asia);

Boundary: Black Sea (West); Russia (North); Azerbaijan (South east); Armenia (South); Turkey (South-west).

Capital: Tbilisi, the largest city of Georgia.

Disintegration of USSR and emergence of independent Georgia in 1991.



But it has faced **many challenges** - Economic crisis, political instability, **secessionist wars** in **Abkhazia** and **South Ossetia**.

Peaceful rose revolution in 2003 -> after this Georgia pursued a pro-west foreign policy, introduced series of democratic and economic reforms **aimed at** integration with NATO and EU.

This western orientation led to Russia-Georgia war in 2008.

7. WEST ASIA

The region is **surrounded by eight major seas**: Aegean Sea, Black Sea, Caspian Sea, the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea.

This region is delimited from Europe by the drainage divide of the Greater Caucasus; delimited from Africa by the Isthmus of Suez; It adjoins Central Asia in North East and South Asia in East. It is located South of Eastern Europe.

Countries: Turkey, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, Oman, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Cyprus.



8. IRAN

Iran (formerly known as Persia) is situated at the crossroads of Central Asia, South Asia, and Arab states of West Asia. This strategic position - and its access to Persian Gulf in the south - have made Iran an important country throughout its history.

Location and neighbouring countries:: It is country located in West Asia and has land boundaries with Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

In the north, it touches Caspian Sea, and in the south, the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman.

Government and Economy: Iran's government is controlled by a religious figure called the Supreme Leader, who is appointed by a group of Islamic clerics called the assembly of experts. A President, elected by the people, is second in command.

History: Iran has seen many great empire - Achaemenid Persian Empire (beginning 559 BCE), Sassanids (beginning 224 CE), Safavids (beginning 1501);

In the North west, Iran also has some areas of Majority Kurdish Population.

Physical features: Iran has Gazros mountain (which runs from North west to South East) and Elbruz Mountain (which lies to its north). It also has Kavir Desert and Lut Desert.

Lut Desert often experience highest land and surface temperature: A temperature of 70.7 degree C has been recorded here.

It is also an UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Lake Urmia is located in the North-west of the country.

Important Ports:

Bandar Abass (Southern coast of country, in Persian Gulf)

Chabahar Port (Gulf of Oman): The Chabahar port is located in the Southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan and is considered a crucial gateway for Iran to gain access to Afghanistan and Central Asia. The idea is that the Port would enable India to bypass Pakistan and access Afghanistan and ultimately Central Asia.



1) OPERATIONA SINDHU (JUNE 2025)

- Students stuck in Iran due to Israel-Iran Conflict were evacuated by Gol under an operation named **Project Sindhu**.
- These students were evacuated from the Urmia University in Iran. They were first made to cross over to Yerevan, Armenia and the flew them to New Delhi.

9. INTERNATIONAL NORTH SOUTH TRANSPORT CORRIDOR

The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is a **7,200 km long multi-modal network of ship, rail, and road routes** for the transport of freight between India, Iran, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Central Asia, and Europe. The objective of the corridor is to increase trade connectivity between major cities such as Mumbai, Moscow, Baku, Astrakhan, Tehran, Bandar Abbas, and Bandar Anzali.

Member States: India, Iran, Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Belarus, Tajikistan, Kyrgystan, Oman, Ukraine, and Syria.



10. PERSIAN GULF

The body of water is an extension of the Arabian Sea (Gulf of Oman) through the **Strait of Hormuz** and lies between Iran to the northeast and the Arabian Peninsula to the southwest.

Countries touching Persian Gulf: 8 - Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, Oman and Saudi Arabia.

Rivers: The **Tigris-Euphrates** river system is a large river system in Western Asia which discharges into the Persian Gulf. Both Tigris and Euphrates originate in Turkey.

The river flows into a south-easterly direction through the central plains and combine with Al-Qurnah to form **Shatt al-Arab** and discharge into Persian gulf.



Mesopotamia is a historical region in Western Asia situated within Tigris Euphrates river system, in the northern part of the Fertile Crescent. Today, Mesopotamia occupy modern Iraq. In broader sense it covered parts of Iran, Syria, Turkey and Kuwait as well.

The Persian Gulf has many fishing grounds, extensive reefs (mostly rocky, but also coral), and abundant pearl oysters, but its ecology has been damaged by industrialization and oil spills

Tigris–Euphrates river system



11. GULF OF OMAN AND STRAIT OF HORMUZ

GULF OF OMAN:

It connects Arabian sea with the Strait of Hormuz, which then runs into the Persian Gulf.

Neighbouring Countries: UAE, Oman, Iran and Pakistan

Important Ports on the Gulf

- Port of Fujairah, UAE
- Port of Khor Fakkan, UAE
- Port of Sultan Qaboos, Oman
- Port of Chabahar, Iran



Strait of Hormuz:

It provides the only sea passage from Persian Gulf to the open ocean and is **one of the world's most strategically important choke points**.

Neighbouring Countries: Iran, UAE and Oman
(Musandam, an exclave of Oman)

It is vital for global energy security

Close to 25% of global oil production (21 million barrels per day bpd) and 20% of global seaborne LPG trade pass through this strait.

Over 80% of this energy supply is destined for China, India, Japan and Southe Korea.

News: During Iran-Israel war the Islamic Parliament of Iran passed a resolution recommending a blockade of the Strait (June 2025)



About Qatar: It is an independent emirates on the west Coast of Persian Gulf. It shares land boundary only **with Saudi Arabia** to its south. It also shares maritime borders with Iran, Bahrain and UAE.

Oil Resources: Qatar has one of the world's largest reserves of petroleum and thus employs large number of foreign workers in the production process.



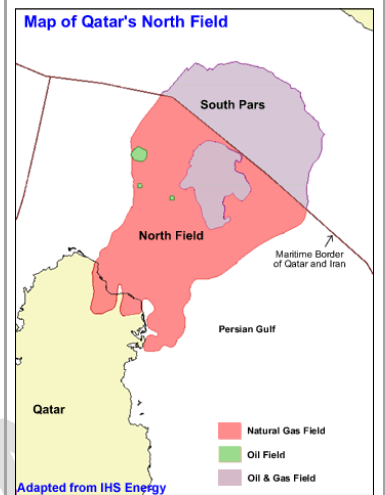
High Standard of Living: Because of oil wealth, country's residents enjoy a very high standard of living.

Capital: Doha - an eastern coast city

Non-NATO Ally: Qatar is also a major non-NATO ally. Major non-NATO ally (MNNA) is a designation given by the US government to close allies that have strategic working relations with the US Armed forces, but are not members of NATO. Important Non-NATO Ally of USA include.

Significance: The status of MNNA doesn't automatically include a mutual defence pact with the USA, it confers variety of military and financial advantages.

North Field and South Pars is a natural-gas condensate field located in the Persian Gulf. It is by far the world's largest natural gas field. With North field being owned by Qatar and South Pars by Iran.



13. YEMEN

- **Geographical basics**
- It is situated on the South-western corner of the Arabian Peninsula.
- Most of the Yemen's northern frontier with Saudi Arabia traverses the great desert of the peninsula, the Rub' al-Khali ("Empty Quarter"), and until 2000 remained non demarcated, as did the eastern frontier with Oman until 1992.
- It is bound on the south by Gulf of Aden and Arabian Sea and the west by Red Sea.



14. GULF OF ADEN

It forms a natural sea link between Red Sea and Arabian Sea. It is named for the seaport of Aden, in the southern Yemen.

It is situated between coast of Arabia and the Horn of Africa.

Gulf water, via the Bab-el-Mandeb strait, flow into the Red Sea, replacing the large-scale evaporation there.

Land Foundary: (Somalia, Djibouti, Yemen, the Socotra Island (part of Yemen)).



15. RED SEA

It is a sea-water inlet of the Indian ocean, lying between Africa and Asia.

It connects to Gulf of Aden through the Bab el Mandeb strait.

In North it is bound by Sinai Peninsula, Gulf of Aqaba and the Gulf of Suez.

Countries neighboring Red Sea: Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia.

High salinity: Salinity averages around 40 ppt (or 4%) due to high evaporation and limited freshwater input.

Note: The saltiest ocean water is in the Red Sea and in the Persian Gulf region (around 40 ppt) due to very high evaporation and little fresh water inflow.

Why in news?

More than 3,000 US military personnel have arrived in the Red Sea aboard two



warships, part of beefed up response from Washington after tanker seizure by Iran (Aug 2023).

Iran had either seized or attempted to take control of nearly 20 internationally flagged ships in the region over the past two years.

16. SINAI PENINSULA

The Sinai Peninsula is a peninsula in Egypt, and the only part of the country located in Asia.

Sinai has a land area of about 60,000 km².

Sinai is triangular in shape, with its northern shore lying on the southern Mediterranean Sea, and its southwest and southeast shores on the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqaba of the Red Sea.

Note: Israel also border Gulf of Aqaba.

Note: Sharmel Sheikh is located at the mouth of Gulf of Aqaba.

It is linked to the African continent by the Isthmus of Suez, 125 kilometres (78 mi) wide strip of land, containing the Suez Canal.

The eastern isthmus, linking it to the Asian mainland, is around 200 kilometres (120 mi) wide. The peninsula's eastern shore separates the Arabian plate from the African plate



17. SUEZ CANAL

The Suez Canal is an artificial sea-level waterway in Egypt, connecting the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea through the Isthmus of Suez and dividing Africa and Asia.

The canal is part of the Silk Road that connects Europe with Asia.



18. CITY OF NEOM

Details of Neom:

The planned city along the Red Sea is emerging as the new centre of power in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as the Crown prince Mohammed Bin Salman (MBS) is largely running government from here. Since the COVID-19 outbreak he has been chairing the cabinet meeting in Neom.

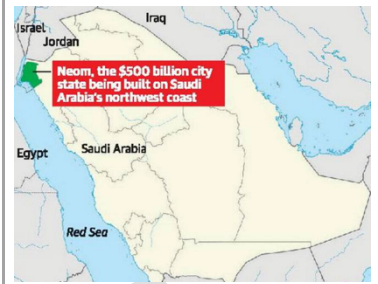
The **plan** for the building of the city was first unveiled in 2017.

As part of the **vision 2030 plan**, which seeks to diversify the Kingdom's economy and reduce its dependency on oil, the \$500 billion ambitious project plans to build a carbon-neutral, technologically advanced city state that can house upto 1 million people.

The city is expected to be opened up for the residents by 2025. It will have flying cars, artificial rain generated through cloud seedings, a giant fake moon and a robot dinosaurs once it is complete.

The entire project is coming up on 26,500 sq km of land in the Tabuk province.

The autonomous city will have its own tax and labour laws and judicial system, independent of the existing governing system in Saudi Arabia.



19. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

West Bank:

The West Bank is a **landlocked territory** near the Mediterranean coast of Western Asia, bordered by Jordan and the Dead Sea to the east and by Israel to the south, west and north.

The "West Bank" name was given to the territory after it was captured by Jordan in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War because it sits on the west side of the Jordan River.

Jordan subsequently annexed the territory in 1950 and held it until 1967 when it was occupied by Israel during the 1967 Six-Day War.



Golan Heights:

Golan Heights (also called Golan Plateau) are hilly areas overlooking the upper Jordan River valley on the west.

The area was part of extreme South West Syria till 1967, when it came under Israeli military occupation, and in Dec 1981 Israel unilaterally annexed the part of the Golan it held.

Geographically, it is bound by the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee on the West.

Note: After the six-day war in 1967, Israel gained control of Sinai Peninsula and Gaza strip from Egypt; West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan; and Golan Heights from Syria.



20. SEA OF GALILEE

The Sea of Galilee is a freshwater lake in Israel.

It is the **lowest freshwater lake on Earth** and the **second-lowest lake in the world**, at levels between 215 metres and 209 metres below sea level.

The lake is fed partly by underground springs but its **main source is the Jordan River**, which flows through it from north to south and exits the lake at the Degania Dam.

The **Sea of Galilee is situated** in northeast Israel, between the Golan Heights and the Galilee region, in the Jordan Rift Valley, the valley caused by the separation of the African and Arabian plates. Consequently, the area is subject to earthquakes, and in the past, volcanic activity. This is evident from the abundant basalt and other igneous rocks that define the geology of Galilee



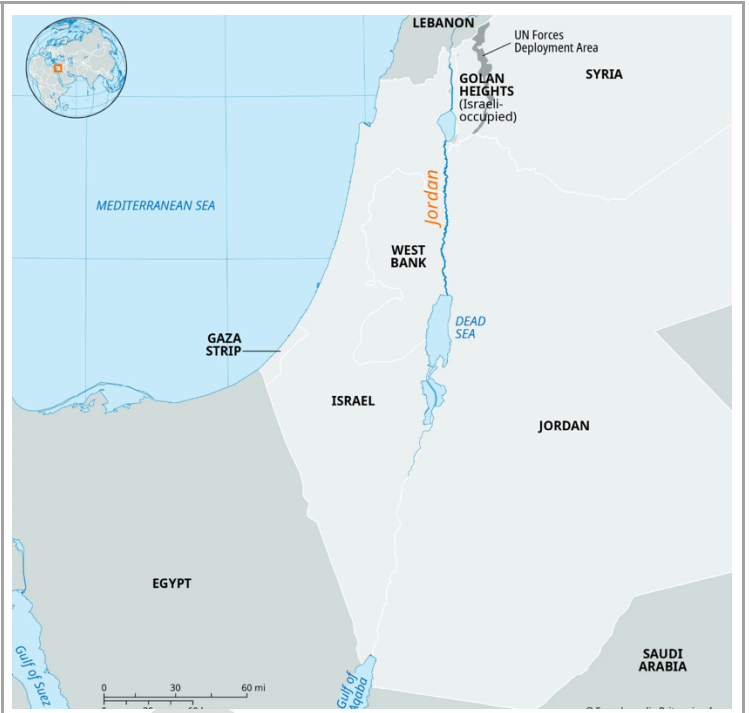
21. JORDON RIVER

Jordan river in west Asia has the **lowest elevation of any river in the world**. It lies in a **structural depression**.

Origin: The river rises on the slopes of **Mount Hermon**, on the border between Syria and Lebanon, and flow southwards through northern Israel to the Sea of Galilee (Lake Tiberius). After that it continues south, forming a border between West Bank and Jordan. It eventually empties in Dead Sea.

Jordan river is shared by Lebanon, Syria, Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority.

Jordan Valley: The lower course of the Jordan river from the exact point where it exits the sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea is referred to as the Jordan Valley. This 105km long Jordan valley forms a part of the Jordan Rift Valley and has the lowest elevation in the world starting from -212m and ending at -400m.



22. JORDON RIFT VALLEY:

- It is an elongated depression located in modern day Israel, Jordan, and the West Bank. The geographic region include entire length of Jordan River - from its sources, through the Hula valley, the Sea of Galilee, the Lower Jordan Valley, the Dead sea (lowest land elevation on earth) and then continues through the Arabah depression, the Gulf of Aqaba, whose shorelines it incorporates, until finally reaching Red Sea proper at the Straits of Tiran.
- **Why was it formed?**
 - » It was formed many million years ago when the **Arabian Plate** moved northward and then eastward away from Africa.

23. DEAD SEA

It is a landlocked salt lake between Israel and Jordan. It's eastern shore belongs to Jordan, and the western shore belongs to Israel.

The sea has the lowest elevation and is the lowest body of water on the surface of earth. The surface of dead sea, at an elevation of about 430 meters below sea level, is the **lowest land point on earth**.

Dead sea receives almost all its water from Jordan river.

Continuous dropping water levels:

The water level has dropped from 390 to 550m (below sea level), while the surface area shrank from 950 km², in the beginning of the 20th century, to the current 392 km². It's because of **excess utilization by both Israel and Jordan**. Most of the water is being diverted upstream.

24. LEBANON

Lebanon is a country in the levant region of west Asia.

Capital: Beirut

Neighbours: Syria (North and East); Israel (South)

Mediterranean sea lies to it west.



25. UNDERSTANDING ISRAEL-HEZBOLLAH TENSIONS:

- **1917: Balfour Declaration:** After the defeat of Ottoman empire in WW-1 at the hands of British, the later declared that part of the Empire's territory (erstwhile Israel, West Bank and Gaza) will become homeland for jews.
- **1918-1946: Migration of Jews and Violence:** In this period, Jews began migrating to historical Palestine in increasing numbers and violence erupt between Jews and Palestinian Arabs until it culminates in a huge ethnic cleansing of Palestinians (Nakba).
- **1948:** Like other Arab states Lebanon fights against the nascent state of Israel and gives refuge to more than 1 lakh Palestinians.
- **In 1949,** Lebanon and Israel agree to an armistice.
- **1968:** Israeli commandos destroy a dozen of passenger planes at Beirut in retaliation to an attack on Israeli airliner by a Lebanon based Palestinian guerrilla group.
- **Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)** relocated to Lebanon after its expulsion from Jordon, leading to increased cross border flareups.

- **1973:** Israeli special forces shoot dead three Palestinian guerrilla leaders in Beirut in retaliation for the killing of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympic.
- **1978:** Israel invades Lebanon in an operation against Palestinian guerillas after a militant attack in Tel-Aviv.
- **1982:** Iran's Revolutionary Guards establish the Shi'ite Muslim armed group Hezbollah in Lebanon.
- **1985:** Israel pull back from central Lebanon in 1983 but retained forces in southern Lebanon. Hezbollah waged guerrilla war against Israeli forces.
- **2000:** Israel withdraws from southern Lebanon ending 22 years of occupation.
- **2006: Five Week War:** Hezbollah crosses the border, kidnap two Israeli soldiers and kill others, sparking a five-week war involving heavy Israeli strikes on both Hezbollah strongholds and national infrastructure.
- **2023:** After Hamas attacked South Israel, Hezbollah trades fire with Israel in support of Palestinians in Israel.
 - » Israeli airstrikes pound border areas of South Lebanon and target sites in Bekaa valley while Hezbollah strikes northern Israel.
- **2024:** Lebanon bombed; Israel detonates pagers used by Hezbollah, killing 39. It launches its biggest bombardment on Lebanon killing more than 500 in a single day.
- **2024:** One of the Hezbollah founders and most prominent leaders Hassan Nasrullah is killed in an Israeli airstrike in Beirut.
 - » Israel also launched ground offensive against Hezbollah.

26. TURKIYE (OLD NAME TURKEY)

- **Name Change:** In June 2022, following an official letter submitted to the UN by the Republic of Turkiye, the country's name has been changed to Turkiye at the UN.
- **Why the name change:** President Recep Tayyip Erdogan issued a statement saying the "word Turkiye represents and expresses the culture, civilization, and values of the Turkish nation in the best way. Domestically, citizens refer to the land as Turkiye, but its anglicised version "Turkey" was adopted internationally.

Turkiye is a transcontinental country bridging South-eastern Europe and Western Asia.

Asian Turkey, which includes 97 percent of the country's territory, is separated from European Turkey by the **Bosphorus, the Sea of Marmara, and the Dardanelles**.

Dardanelles Strait (also known as Gallipoli strait) is a narrow natural strait and internationally significant waterway in the northwest of Turkey. It forms the continental boundary between Asia and Europe and separates Asian Turkey from European Turkey.

Bosphorus Strait: it is an internationally significant waterway located in Istanbul in north-western Turkey. It also forms part of continental boundary between Asia and Europe and divides Turkey by separating



Anatolia and Thrace. It is world's narrowest strait used for international navigation.

Dardanelles Strait and Bosphorus Strait are together called **Turkish Straits**.

Sea of Marmara: In 2021, the Sea of Marmara saw the largest outbreak of 'Sea Snot'. Sea snot refers to marine mucilage that is formed when algae are overloaded with nutrients due to pollution. It looks like vicious brown and foamy substance.

European Turkey comprises only 3 percent of the country's territory.

The country is **encircled by seas on three sides**: the Aegean Sea to the west, the Black Sea to the north and the Mediterranean Sea to the south.

Turkey also contains the Sea of Marmara in the northwest

Neighbouring Countries: Iran, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Bulgaria, Greece, Syria and Iraq.

Note: **Anatolia** (also known as Asia Minor), is a large peninsula in Western Asia and is the westernmost extension of continental Asia. The landmass of Anatolia constitute most of the territory of contemporary Turkey. Geographically, Anatolia consist of Turkish Straits in the North-west, Black Sea to the north, the Armenian Highlands to the east, the Mediterranean Sea to the South, and the Aegean Sea to the west.



27. TURKEY-SYRIA 2023 EARTHQUAKE

On 6th Feb 2023, earthquake of 7.8 intensity had struck Southern and Central Turkey and northern and western Syria. It has killed around 60,000 people.

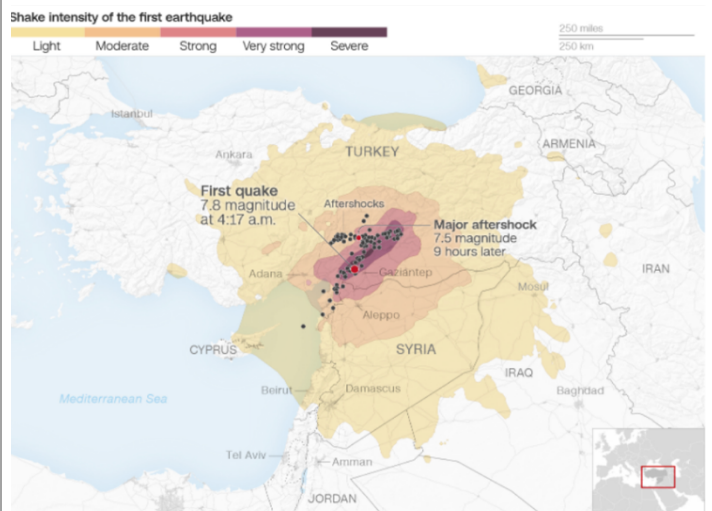
It was the deadliest earthquake in what is now present day Turkey since the 526 Antioch Earthquake.

The epicentre was near the Turkish city of **Gaziantep**.

Gaziantep is a major city in south-central Turkey.

It is the capital of the Gaziantep Province in the westernmost part of Turkey's southeastern Antolia region and partially in the Mediterranean region.

Around half a million Syrian Refugees live here.



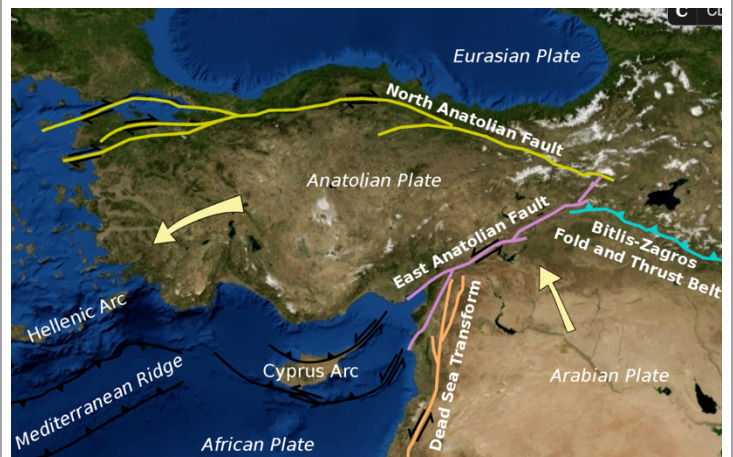
Antakya (known as **Antioch** to the people of ancient Greece and Rome) is another city that has been badly damaged by the earthquake. It is the capital of southernmost province of Turkey. The city is located in a well-watered and fertile valley on the **Orontes river**.



Turkey's **two main fault zones**, the **East Anatolian** and the **North Anatolian**, make it one of the most seismically active regions in the world, and more than 70 quakes of magnitude 6.5 or higher have been recorded in the region since 1990.

Central Southern Turkey and Northwestern Syria are affected by the interaction between three tectonic plates - the **African Plate**, **Arabian Plate** and **Anatolian Plate**. The boundary between the African and Arabian plate is represented by the Dead Sea Transform (DST) - a major zone of left-lateral strike slip fault - **it accommodates the relative northward movement of Arabia** with respect to **Africa**.

The Northern end of DST truncates at **East Anatolian Fault** (EAF) another major left lateral strike slip fault zone that accommodates the overall westward movement of Anatolian Plate as it is extruded in that direction by the northward movement of the Arabian plate.



28.SYRIA:

Capital: Damascus

Neighbours: Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon

Maritime boundary with Mediterranean Sea.

Lake: Al Assad (along Euphrates river)

Rivers: Euphrates and Khabur

Civil War in Syria: Northern part is controlled by Kurdish Forces.



29. ASSAD REGIME FALLS IN SYRIA (DEC 2024)

Background:

- Syria has been ruled by **Assad family** for over five decades with President Bashar-Al Assad taking power in 2000 following the death of his father **Hafez Assad**.
- The country erupted in **anti-Assad protests in 2011**, inspired by the Arab Spring uprisings across most of the middle east. Assad's harsh crackdown escalated into a Civil war.
- Initially, the Syrian President Bashar-Al-Assad had lost most of the population centers except Damascus and the Alawite-dominated coastal cities.
- There were **multiple rebel and jihadist (terrorist) factions** such as the Free Syrian Army, Jabhat al-Nusra (al-Qaeda's Syria branch) and the Islamic State (ISIS).
- The **ISIS** controlled the eastern Syrian cities of Raqqa and Deir Ezzor as well as the ancient city of Palmyra (in the province of HIMS).
- **Free Syrian Army and Al-Nusra** were controlling parts of Idlib in the northwest.
- **Other militant groups** were controlling Hama, Homs, and even some neighbourhood of Damascus.



- In the south, Daara and Quneitra were restive.
- **Then, Asad was helped by Russia** when Russian President Vladimir Putin decided to send troops to Russia.
- **Kurdish Militias** backed by the US, fought the IS in the east and **Syrian Army, backed by Russia, Iran and Hezbollah**, fought the other rebel groups, recapturing the lost territory.
- **By later 2016**, this civil war had entered a frozen state after the Bashar Al Assad regime recaptured most of its lost territory. The **militants continued to hold on to Idlib** when the war got frozen.

30. KURDISTAN

It is a broadly defined geographical region inhabited mainly by **Kurds**. It consists of an extensive plateau and mountain area, spread over large parts of what is now eastern Turkey, North Eastern Syria, Northern Iraq, North Western Iran, and some smaller parts of Armenia.

Iran and Iraq has territories named after them - Kordestan, and Kurdish autonomous region.

This region has been home of Kurds since ancient times.

They have been trying for an independent Kurdistan country for long, but have failed so far.



31. LEVANT REGION



Levant is a term in geography that refers to an area in the middle east. It includes the historic areas of Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine and Syria. It also includes parts of Iraq, Turkey, Cyprus, and Saudi Arabia.

It is bounded by Taurus mountain to the north, the Mediterranean Sea to the West, the Northern Arabian Desert to the South and the Upper Mesopotamia to the east.



Levelup