

## News Analysis (01 Sep, 2021)

---

 [drishtias.com/current-affairs-news-analysis-editorials/news-analysis/01-09-2021/print](https://drishtias.com/current-affairs-news-analysis-editorials/news-analysis/01-09-2021/print)

### China's New Sea-Road-Rail Link to Indian Ocean

---

#### Why in News

---

Recently, a new sea-road-rail link providing Chengdu (China) with access to the Indian Ocean via Yangon (Myanmar) was opened.

The trade corridor is **China's first to link western China with the Indian Ocean.**



#### Key Points

---

### About New Trade Corridor:

- The new trade corridor passage **connects the logistics lines of Singapore, Myanmar and China**, and is currently the most **convenient land and sea channel linking the Indian Ocean with southwest China**.
- China also has plans to develop **another port in Kyaukphyu in the Rakhine state, Myanmar** including a proposed railway line from Yunnan (China) directly to the port, but the progress there has been stalled by **unrest in Myanmar**.
- China plans to develop this region in Myanmar as a **'border economic cooperation zone'** under the **Belt and Road Initiative**.
- It is expected to become the **lifeblood of international trade for China**, while providing a source of income for Myanmar.
- This trade corridor is **another direct Chinese outlet to the Indian ocean**.  
The first one being at the **Gwadar port in Pakistan**.
- This trade route is also **China's alternative to the "Malacca Dilemma"**.
  - Malacca Dilemma is a **word coined in 2003**, by the then Chinese President Hu Jintao.
  - This **refers to China's fear of a maritime blockade at the Straits of Malacca**. Since most of China's oil imports pass through the Straits of Malacca, a maritime blockade here could paralyze China's economy.

### Geographic Location of Malacca Strait



### About Gwadar Port:

- Gwadar is being developed as part of the CPEC to the far **western Xinjiang region**.
- Gwadar has long been touted as the site for a Chinese base suitable for **People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN)** operations.
- China pursues a "**strategic strongpoint**" concept whereby **strategically sited foreign ports containing terminals and commercial zones** operated by Chinese firms can be used by its military.
- Such "strongpoints" offer the potential for China to form a network of supply, logistics and intelligence hubs along the **perimeter of the Indian Ocean**.
  - This is referred to as the **String of Pearls theory**.
- Gwadar is important to China for **three reasons**:
  - One is establishing **direct transport links to the Indian Ocean** via the CPEC.
  - The second factor is that Gwadar helps anchor or **stabilise western China, a region where China feels vulnerable to Islamic agitation**.
  - Further, Gwadar is just 400 km from the important **Hormuz Strait** (linking Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian sea), through which 40% of Chinese imported oil flows.



### **Implications for India:**

- China's economic stakes in the Bay of Bengal and this new trade corridor signifies a larger maritime presence and naval engagement in the region which in turn **reinforces the string of pearls policy by China.**
- Apart from **this trade corridor** and **China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)**, China is also planning the **China-Nepal Economic Corridor (CNEC)** which will link Tibet to Nepal.
  - The endpoints of the project will touch the boundaries of the Gangetic plain.
  - Thus three corridors signify the economic as well as strategic rise of China in the Indian subcontinent.

**Source: TH**

---

## **Revisiting Draft e-Commerce Rules**

---

### **Why in News**

---

Amid criticism from industries and some sections of government, the Department of Consumer Affairs is learnt to be revisiting some provisions pertaining to **draft e-commerce rules, 2021.**

- Earlier, the **Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food, and Public Distribution** notified and made effective the provisions of the **Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020** under the **Consumer Protection Act, 2019.**
- Further, the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has issued orders appointing an advisory committee for its **Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC)** project that is aimed at curbing “digital monopolies”.

This is in the direction of **making e-commerce processes open source**, thus creating a platform that can be utilised by all online retailers.

### **Key Points**

---

- **Key Provisions of Draft e-Commerce Rules 2021:**

- **Mandatory Registration:** There is a need for mandatory registration for e-commerce entities with the Department of Promotion for Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

E-commerce entity means persons who own, operate or manage a digital or electronic facility or platform for electronic commerce.

- **Limiting Flash Sales:** Conventional e-commerce flash sales are not banned. Only specific flash sales or back-to-back sales which limit customer choice, increase prices and prevent a level playing field are not allowed.
- **Compliance Officer:** The e-commerce sites are also directed to ensure appointment of Chief Compliance Officer (CCO) and a nodal contact person for 24x7 coordination with law enforcement agencies.
- **Restricting Related Parties:** To tackle growing concerns of preferential treatment, the new rules propose to ensure none of the related parties are allowed to use any consumer information (from the online platform) for 'unfair advantage'.
- **Clause of Country of Origin:** The entities will also have to identify goods based on their country of origin and provide a filter mechanism at a pre-purchase stage for customers.

They will also have to offer alternatives to these imported goods to provide a "fair opportunity" to domestic sellers.

- **Reporting Cybersecurity Issues:** All e-commerce entities must provide information within 72 hours on any request made by an authorised government agency, probing any breach of the law including cybersecurity issues.

- **Major Issues Pertaining to Draft Rules:**
  - **Definition of ‘Related Party’:** The draft rules state that “**none of an e-commerce entity’s ‘related parties** can be enlisted **as a seller for sale to consumers directly.**
    - This “broad definition” of ‘related party’ can **potentially include all entities** such as those involved in logistics, any joint ventures, etc.
    - Due to this, it will be **difficult not only for foreign players like Amazon and Flipkart, but even homegrown companies** to have their various brands such as 1mg, Netmeds, Urban Ladder, etc. sell on their **super-apps.**
  - **Issue over Fall-back Liability:** Industry players have argued that on the one hand the **FDI (Foreign Direct Investment)** policy prohibits companies such as Amazon and Flipkart from having control over the inventory sold on their platforms.
    - On the other hand, the rules introduced the concept of **fall-back liability, which makes the e-commerce firms liable** in case a seller on their platform fails to deliver goods or services due to negligent conduct, which causes loss to the customer.
  - **Overreaching Jurisdiction:** The **NITI Aayog** has raised concerns that many of the provisions in draft rules were “beyond the realm” of consumer protection.
    - This creates a perception of “overreach” by the Consumer Affairs Department.
  - **Case of Tight Regulation:** Some of the proposed provisions like having a compliance officer, adherence to law enforcement requests, etc., follow in the footsteps of the **Information Technology (Intermediary) Rules, 2021.**
    - These IT rules are facing legal challenges in several High courts.
    - Thus, the rules reflect the increasing Government’s will to exercise greater oversight over all online platforms.

Source: IE

---

## **Sand and Dust Storms Risk Assessment in Asia and the Pacific**

---

### **Why in News**

---

According to a new **United Nations (UN)** report, more than **500 million people in India** and **more than 80% of the entire populations** of Turkmenistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran are **exposed to medium and high levels of poor air quality due to sand and dust storms.**

The **risk of impacts from sand and dust storms is projected to increase in the 2030s** due to more extreme drought conditions in parts of Western Australia, south-eastern Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan.

### **Key Points**

---

- **Sand and Dust Storms:**

- **About:**

- Sand and dust storms are **common meteorological hazards** in arid and semi-arid regions.
    - They are usually caused by **thunderstorms – or strong pressure gradients** associated with **cyclones** – which increase wind speed over a wide area.
    - Some **40% of aerosols in the troposphere (the lowest layer of Earth's atmosphere)** are dust particles from wind erosion.

- **Main Sources:**

- The main sources of these mineral dusts are the **arid regions of Northern Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, Central Asia and China.**
    - Comparatively, **Australia, America and South Africa** make minor, but still important, contributions.

- **Impacts:**

- **Negative:**

- **Impact on Power Plants:**

- They can interfere with energy infrastructure, adversely affecting electricity transmission lines and causing power outages.
      - India, China and Pakistan witnessed **1,584 gigawatt-hours (gWh), 679 gWh and 555 gWh of energy loss**, respectively.
      - These losses amounted to over **Rs. 782 crore for India per year**.

- **Affect Source of Freshwater:**

- Very high dust deposition also occurs in the **Himalaya-Hindu Kush mountain range** and the **Tibetan Plateau**, the so-called ‘**third pole**’ that are the sources for fresh water for more than 1.3 billion people in Asia.

- **Increases Melting of Ice:**

- The deposition of dust on glaciers induces a **warming effect**, increasing the melting of ice, with direct and indirect impacts on society through numerous issues, including food security, energy production, agriculture, water stress and flood regimes.

- **On Farmland:**

- Dust deposition **impacted large portions of farmland** in Turkmenistan, Pakistan and Uzbekistan.

- Much of this dust is characterised by **high salt content, making it toxic for plants**.

- It **reduces yield**, posing a significant threat to the production of irrigated cotton and other crops.

- **On Sustainable Development Goals (SDG):**

- They directly affect **11 of the 17 United Nations-mandated Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)**:

- Ending poverty in all forms, Ending hunger, Good health and well-being, Affordable and clean energy, Decent work and economic growth, Climate action, etc.

- **Positive:**

- They can **increase the nutrient content in the areas of deposition** and benefit vegetation.
    - Dust **deposited on water bodies can alter their chemical characteristics**, triggering both positive as well as adverse outcomes.
    - Dust particles that carry iron can enrich parts of oceans, **improving the phytoplankton balance and impacting marine food webs**.



- **Suggestions:**

- Their impacts are complex, and thus, they represent **an important emerging issue for policy-makers in the Asia-Pacific region.**
- Member States **need to strategize their joint actions**, considering gaining a deeper understanding of the socio-economic impact of sand and dust storms, establishing a coordinated monitoring and early warning system with an impact-based focus, and coordinating actions in most at-risk and exposed geographical areas to mitigate the risks.

**Source: DTE**

---

## **Groundwater Conservation**

---

### **Why in News**

---

India is **majorly dependent on groundwater for irrigation** and is pumping out the lion's share of the global volume of groundwater. Around **70% of food production in India** is done with the help of irrigation wells.

However, this **over-dependence on groundwater** is leading to a groundwater crisis. There is a need for a holistic action plan for groundwater conservation.

### **Key Points**

---

- **About:**

- The **UNESCO** World Water Development Report, 2018 states that **India is the largest extractor of groundwater in the world.**
- In India, construction of **irrigation wells does not require any clearance** and no records are maintained of abandoned wells.
  - Several hundred wells are constructed in India every day and even more are abandoned when they run dry.
- The **contribution of groundwater to national gross domestic product is never measured.**
- According to the **Central Ground Water Board (CGWB, Ministry of Jal Shakti)**, with 230 billion metre cube of groundwater drawn out each year for irrigating agriculture lands in India, many parts of the country are experiencing rapid depletion of groundwater.
  - The total estimated groundwater depletion in India is in the range of 122–199 billion metre cube.

- **Reasons for Groundwater Depletion:**

- **Increased demand** for water for domestic, industrial and agricultural needs and limited surface water resources.
- **Limited storage facilities** owing to the hard rock terrain, along with the added disadvantage of lack of rainfall, especially in central Indian states.
- **Green Revolution** enabled water intensive crops to be grown in drought prone/ water deficit regions, leading to over extraction of groundwater.
  - Frequent pumping of water from the ground without waiting for its replenishment leads to quick depletion.
- **Subsidies on electricity** and high **MSP (Minimum Support Price)** for water intensive crops.
- **Water contamination** as in the case of pollution by landfills, septic tanks, leaky underground gas tanks, and from overuse of fertilizers and pesticides leading to damage and depletion of groundwater resources.
- **Inadequate regulation of groundwater** encourages the exhaustion of groundwater resources without any penalty.
- **Deforestation, unscientific methods of agriculture, chemical effluents from industries, lack of sanitation** also lead to pollution of groundwater, making it unusable.

- **Role of Women vis-a-vis Groundwater Usage:**

- Women **form the bulk of the farm labour force** in irrigated agriculture. But, they have **no decision-making role in investments on such wells**.
- Further, **unaware** about their right to land, natural resources and access to banks, they do not have the required legal support to fight this injustice.
- However, they have emerged as the **first respondents to the Groundwater crisis** and are responsible for overcoming drinking water shortages, finding alternative livelihoods and running the farm and family.
  - Their preference is for crops with a lower water footprint, farming integrated with animals, easy market access for vegetables/flowers/fruits, penchant for use of green water (rainwater that collects in soil) over blue water and building soil zones into a reservoir of moisture.

- **Government Initiatives for Groundwater Conservation:**

- **Atal Bhujal Yojana**
- **National Aquifer Mapping and Management Programme**

## Way Forward

---

- **Increasing Role of Women in Groundwater Conservation:**
  - **Women's judgement** on crop plans, water demand and footprint of crops is **different from that of men.**
  - The contrasting values of women and men were **demonstrated during the Chipko movement**. Women settled for nothing short of a complete ban on the felling of trees to help protect the environment, while their male counterparts conceded to controlled logging in exchange for livelihood.
  - Chipko movement **galvanised women groups to speak out and confront the system/authorities on everyday concerns** linked to social justice, education, health, crime against women and other local issues.
- **Regulated Pumping:**
  - Capping groundwater pumping for each farm based on an approved crop plan.
  - Conducting annual groundwater audits at different units scaled up to the river basin.
- **Enforcement of Local Governance:**
  - Reinventing grass-root democracy, strengthening local institutions and exercising local governance will have a positive effect on groundwater conservation.
  - Organising small farmers in villages into registered bodies, federated at the district with equal participation of women responsible for managing the entire value chain.

**Source: DTE**

---

## **Crocodylian Species in India**

---

### **Why in News**

---

Recently, **Odisha's Kendrapara district** has earned the distinction of being the **only district in India where all three species of crocodiles, salt-water, gharial and mugger, are found.**

### **Key Points**

---

- **Mugger or Marsh Crocodile:**



- **Description:**

- An egg-laying and hole-nesting species, also known to be dangerous.

- **Habitat:**

- Mainly **restricted to the Indian subcontinent** where it may be found in a number of freshwater habitat types and also in coastal saltwater lagoons and estuaries.
  - It is **already extinct in Bhutan and Myanmar.**

- **Threats:**

- Habitat destruction, fragmentation, and transformation, fishing activities and use of crocodile parts for medicinal purposes.

- **Protection Status:**

- **IUCN List of Threatened Species:** Vulnerable
  - **CITES:** Appendix I
  - **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972:** Schedule I

- **Estuarine or Saltwater Crocodile:**



- **Description:**

Considered as the **Earth's largest living crocodile species**, infamous globally as a known man-eater.

- **Habitat:**

- Found in Odisha's **Bhitarkanika National Park**, the **Sundarbans** in West Bengal and the **Andamans and Nicobar Islands**.
- Also found across Southeast Asia and northern Australia.

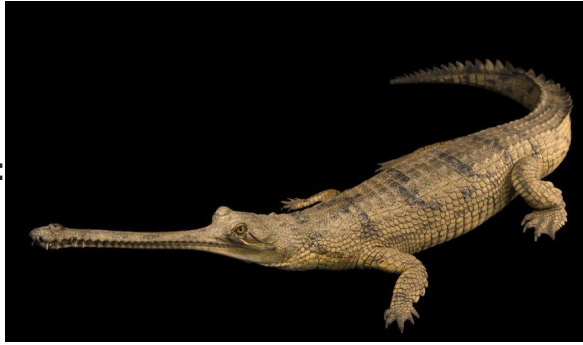
- **Threats:**

Illegal hunting, habitat loss, and antipathy toward the species because of its reputation as a man-eater.

- **Protection Status:**

- **IUCN List of Threatened Species:** Least Concern
- **CITES :** Appendix I (except the populations of Australia, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, which are included in Appendix II).
- **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 :** Schedule I

- **Gharial:**



- **Description:**

- Sometimes called gavials, are a **type of Asian crocodylian** distinguished by their long, thin snouts which resembles a pot (ghara in Hindi).
- The population of Gharials is a **good indicator of clean river water**.
- Known to be a **relatively harmless, fish-eating species**.

- **Habitat:**

- Mostly found in **fresh waters of the himalayan rivers**.
- The **Chambal river** in the northern slopes of the Vindhya mountains (Madhya Pradesh) is known as the **primary habitat** of gharials.
- Other himalayan rivers like **Ghagra**, Gandak river, Girwa river, Ramganga river and the Sone river are **secondary habitats**.

- **Threats:**

Illegal sand mining, poaching, increased river pollution, dam construction, massive-scale fishing operations and **Floods**.

- **Protection Status:**

- **IUCN List of Threatened Species:** Critically Endangered
- **CITES:** Appendix I
- **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972:** Schedule I

- **Conservation Efforts:**

- **Odisha** has announced a **cash award of Rs. 1,000** to conserve gharials in **Mahanadi River Basin**.
- The **Crocodile Conservation Project** was launched in **1975** in different States.

**Source: DTE**

---

## **Covid-19 Endemicity**

---

### **Why in News**

---

According to the **World Health Organization (WHO)** India seems to be entering some stage of **Covid-19 endemicity** where there is **low- to moderate-level transmission**.

### **Key Points**

---

- **Endemicity:**
  - An endemic disease is a disease that is **always present in a certain population or a given geographical region.**
  - Some examples of endemics include **chicken pox and malaria**, where there are a predictable number of cases every year in certain parts of the world.
- **Endemic vs Epidemic vs Pandemic:**
  - Endemic diseases are often confused with epidemics. However, an **epidemic refers to an outbreak of a disease.** An epidemic occurs when a disease is spreading through one or more populations. In contrast, the endemic disease is one that is constantly present in a group or geographic area.
    - **Pandemics** are worldwide epidemics. A pandemic affects more people and takes more lives than an epidemic.
  - Under certain circumstances, an **epidemic can lead to a disease becoming endemic.**
- **Reason for Covid's Endemicity:**
  - Only those pathogens can be eradicated that **don't have animals (another species) as a reservoir.**
    - **Smallpox and polio** are human virus examples, **rinderpest** is a cattle virus.
  - It means if there is a **virus/pathogen that is present in some animal reservoir** then it **can transmit again once the level of immunity wanes in the population** against the disease caused by it.
  - In the case of **coronavirus disease**, it will **continue to circulate as it is present in the animal reservoir.**
- **Implications:**
  - **On Immunity:**
    - If **enough people are vaccinated or have been exposed** to the infection, then the **virus will cause symptomatic infection but not disease.**
  - **On Future Cases:**
    - As long as the **new variant does not come with much more transmissibility** than **Delta variant**, it is more likely that **there will be a steady level of cases, with some regions**, especially of low prior seroprevalence and low vaccination rates, seeing spikes.

**Source: IE**

## **Loan Guarantee Scheme for Covid-affected Sectors (LGSCAS)**

### **Why in News**

Recently, the Finance Minister has asked all stakeholders to conclude **Rs 50,000 crore Loan Guarantee Scheme for Covid-Affected Sectors (LGSCAS)** in non-metros in time to deal with any future third wave.

The LGSCAS scheme is **aimed at boosting medical infrastructure in the country**, specifically targeting underserved areas.

## Key Points

---

- **About:**
  - The scheme was **approved** by the government in **June 2021**.
  - **Banks would provide loans for building healthcare infrastructure in non-metro cities and smaller towns** at a maximum interest rate of **7.95%**.
- **Guarantee Coverage:**
  - LGSCAS provides a **guarantee of 50% for brownfield projects and 75% to greenfield projects** for loans sanctioned up to Rs.100 crore, set up at urban or rural locations other than 8 Metropolitan Tier 1 cities (Class X cities).
  - For **aspirational districts**, the guarantee cover for **both brownfield expansion and greenfield projects is 75%**.
  - **Guarantee duration** is up to 3 years.
    - Greenfield describes a completely new project that has to be executed from scratch, while a brownfield project is one that has been worked on by others.
- **Expected Benefits:**
  - Will help the country **in shoring up its much-needed healthcare infrastructure** along with **creating more employment opportunities**.
  - The main objective of LGSCAS is to **partially mitigate credit risk (primarily construction risk) and facilitate bank credit at lower rates of interest**.
- **Eligibility:**

Applicable to all eligible loans sanctioned up to 31st March, 2022 or till an amount of Rs. 50,000 crore is sanctioned, whichever is earlier.

**Source: PIB**

---

## PISA (Program for International Student Assessment): OECD

---

### Why in News

---

The field trial of **PISA (Program for International Student Assessment)** is scheduled to be held from September, 2021.

## Key Points

---

- **About:**
  - It is a **competency-based test designed to assess the ability of the 15-year-old candidates that measures their reading, mathematics, and science literacy every three years** to apply their knowledge to real-life situations.
  - It is an international survey coordinated by the **Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)**, and was first conducted in 2000.



- **India's Participation:**

- India has participated in the **PISA test only once before, in 2009**. In this round of PISA, where students from Himachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu sat for the test, **India ranked 72<sup>nd</sup> out of 73 countries**, outranking only Kyrgyzstan.
- Since then, **India has strayed away from the test until now**, for students from Chandigarh will be sitting for the test in 2022.

Originally the **main PISA survey was scheduled for 2021**, but was **postponed by one year** owing to the pandemic.

- **Significance for India:**

- Learnings from participation in PISA will **help to introduce competency-based examination reforms in the school system** and help move away from rote learning. The **CBSE and NCERT will be part of the process** and activities leading to the actual test.
- It would **lead to recognition and acceptability of Indian students** and prepare them for the **global economy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**.

## Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

- It was **formed in 1961**. It has **38 member countries**. **India is not a member** but one of the key partners of the organisation.
- It is an **international organisation**, having a goal to shape policies that foster prosperity, equality, opportunity and well-being for all.
- It is **headquartered at Paris, France**.
- The **Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Secretariat** is located at OECD headquarters.

**Source: IE**

---

## World Heritage Institute of Training and Research – Asia Pacific

---

### Why in News

---

Recently, the **World Heritage Institute of Training and Research – Asia Pacific (WHITR-AP)** has recognised **CEPT (Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology, Gujarat)** University's programme in conservation and regeneration as a **commended case of Global Innovation on World Heritage Education**.

The World Heritage Education Programme was initiated as a **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)** special project in 1994. It gives young people a chance to voice their concerns and to become involved in the protection of common cultural and natural heritage.

### Key Points

---

- **About:**
  - The WHITR-AP is a **non-profit organization** specialized in the area of **heritage conservation**.
  - It is an **institute under the auspices of UNESCO**, it is the **first one established in the developing countries**.
  - It is an **autonomous institution** at the service of member states and associate members of UNESCO.
- **Mission:**

To strengthen implementation of the **World Heritage Convention 1972** in the Asia and the Pacific region.
- **World Heritage Convention:**
  - It is one of the most important **global conservation instruments which was created in 1972**.
    - Its mission is to **identify and protect the world's natural and cultural heritage** considered to be of Outstanding Universal Value.
  - It **sets out the duties of States Parties in identifying potential sites and their role in protecting and preserving them**.
    - By signing the Convention, each country pledges to conserve not only the World Heritage sites situated on its territory, but also to protect its national heritage.
  - India is a signatory to the convention and has 40 **world heritage sites**, which includes 32 cultural, 7 natural and one mixed property.
    - Ramappa Temple** in Telangana was the 39<sup>th</sup> and **Dholavira** in Gujarat was India's 40th world heritage site.

**Source: IE**

---

## **Fukutoku-Okanoba Volcano: Japan**

---

### **Why in News**

---

Recently, the **Fukutoku-Okanoba Submarine Volcano** exploded in the Pacific Ocean, off Japan.

Earlier, a surge of **Earthquakes** and the ground swelling was noticed at **Hawaii's Kilauea Volcano**.



## Key Points

- It is situated about **25 metres below the sea, five kilometres north of Japan's South Iwo Jima Island.**
- The plume reached a height of 16 kilometres above the surface, which **poses a risk to the passage of planes and ships.**
- Plume went straight from **being a submarine event to an eruption cloud reaching the lower boundary of the Stratosphere,** this is not very common for this type of volcano.
  - Normally **lower-level plumes** are seen from submarine eruptions.
  - Eruption and submarine hydrothermal activities **often cause water discoloration in the area, and during eruption, the volcano has built several temporary new islands.**

## Submarine Volcanoes

- **From Hawaii to Indonesia to Iceland, hundreds of islands across the globe have been formed by submarine volcanoes.** Submarine volcanoes are exactly what they sound like—volcanoes located beneath the ocean's surface.
- Because they erupt into water instead of air, submarine volcanoes **behave quite differently than terrestrial volcanoes.** For instance, it's uncommon for submarine volcanoes to have explosive eruptions.

- The sheer weight of the water above them creates very high pressure, usually resulting in what are known as **passive lava flows along the seafloor**. Most submarine eruptions do not disturb the ocean surface.

**Source: DTE**

---