Guam Crisis

Why in news?

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North Korea has threatened to launch a nuclear attack on Guam Island, a US territory.

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What are North Korea’s nuclear capabilities?

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- North Korea says it has conducted five successful nuclear tests: in 2006, 2009, 2013 and in January and September 2016.
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- Although all the previous ones were atomic bombs, North Korea claimed that its January 2016 test was of a hydrogen bomb (fusion principle).
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- The H-bomb claim, although not verified, the yield of the bombs appears to have increased over the years.
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- Its delivery mechanisms aren’t very impressive with multiple failures & some low range successes.
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- Recently, after repeated tests, it succeeded in successfully testing an ‘Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile - IRBM’ know as ‘Hwasong -12’ with a range of above 3700km.
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- This brings the island of Guam within its range.
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- North Korea’s leader Kim Jong Un sees the nuclear program as a mechanism sustaining his isolated hermit regime.
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What is ‘Guam Island’?

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- Guam is an island located in the Micronesia region of the Pacific, it is positioned just over 3000 miles from both Sydney and Hawaii.
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- The territory’s tropical climate, with an average temperature of 28 degrees Celsius, makes it a popular location for tourists.
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- The island has 1,60,000 residents and 40 per cent of whom are comprised of the Chamorro ethnic group, are American citizens by birth.
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- Chamorros first settled the island about 4,000 years ago but over the past 400 years Guam has been ruled by Spain, the US and Japan.
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- It was captured by the US from Spain in 1898 during the Spanish-American war, is America’s most western territory but it is not a state.
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- It has a seat in the US House of Representatives, currently occupied by Democrat Madeleine Bordallo, and it is run by an elected governor, Eddie Baza Calvo.
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- American military bases, including the sprawling Andersen Air Force Base and the Naval Base Guam, occupy nearly 30 per cent of the island.
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What is its significance?

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- The remote 210-square mile US territory, near the Mariana trench, is a vital US military outpost and host to strategic bombers and at least 6,000 US service members.
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- Japanese soldiers take part in joint military exercises between the US, Japan, France and UK on Naval Base Guam
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- Guam’s importance to America’s Pacific defence capabilities, and its location as the closest point of American soil to North Korea, just 2,200 miles southeast, have left it vulnerable to being caught in the crossfire of dictator Kim Jong-un’s bellicose missile threats.
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- The training operation may be one reason why North Korea specifically threatened the island.
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Source: TheHindu

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