

Prelim Bits 16-07-2018

World Customs Organisation (WCO)

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- India has become the Vice-Chair (Regional Head) of the Asia Pacific Region of WCO for a period of two years (2018-2020).

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- WCO established in 1952, is an **independent intergovernmental body** whose mission is to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of Customs administrations.

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- WCO is the only international organization with competence in Customs matters.

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- It represents 182 Customs administrations across the globe that collectively process approximately 98% of world trade.

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- The organisation has divided its membership into six regions. Each of the regions is represented by an elected vice-chairperson to the WCO council.

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- It is considered as the voice of the International Customs community.

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Social Media Communication Hubs

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- The Supreme Court recently took a strong note of the social media communication hub proposed by Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

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- It is a hub for monitoring online data and will be setup in each district across the country.

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- Using this analytical tool, the Centre wishes to **track social media movements** in every district of the country to predict a global public perception.

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- It may also help in tackling fake news and the Centre will gauge people's reactions to their schemes and strategies.
- The SC has observed that it would result in creating a surveillance state.

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MeerKAT radio telescope

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- MeerKAT telescope is a scientific mega-project in South Africa.
- It will be an array of 64 interlinked receptors to unlock cosmic conundrums from dark energy to detecting extraterrestrial life.
- A receptor is the complete antenna structure, with the main reflector, sub-reflector and all receivers, digitisers and other electronics installed.
- It will be incorporated into the complex Square Kilometre Array (SKA) instrument.
- It is the biggest radio telescope of its kind in the southern hemisphere.

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Golden Jackel

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- Destruction of mangrove cover in the Bandar Reserve Forest is forcing the golden jackal out of its habitat.
- The conservation status of the animal is the '**least concern**' and it preys on wild crab and fish.
- The Golden Jackal is widespread in North and north-east Africa, Arabian Peninsula, Eastern Europe and the entire Indian Subcontinent.
- In India, jackal populations achieve high densities in pastoral areas such as Kutch, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Haryana.
- It is present in all protected areas of India except for those in the high elevation regions of the Himalayas.

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- The species is included in CITES Appendix III (in India).

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- Jackals feature on Schedule III of the Wildlife Protection Act (1972) of India and are afforded the least legal protection (mainly to control trade of pelts and tails).

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Harrier birds

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- Harrier birds are **migratory raptor species** that regularly visits vast swathes of India.

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- India has one of the largest roosting sites in the world for Pallid Harriers and Montagu's Harriers.

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- Recent reports highlights that the numbers of birds visiting the site are declining.

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- While a general declining trend was observed in all the monitored sites, researchers noted the most dramatic changes at the **Rollapadu Bustard Sanctuary in Andhra Pradesh's Kurnool district**.

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- In Hessarghatta on the outskirts of Bengaluru, Western Marsh Harriers declined significantly, leaving the area nearly deserted.

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- The gravest concern is the **loss of grasslands**, either to urbanisation or to agriculture.

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- Excessive use of pesticides in farms in and around the roosting sites could also be a reason for the lowered population counts.

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Greener pastures

India has one of the largest roosting sites in the world for Pallid Harriers and Montagu's Harriers. At least five species of harriers have been recorded in India over the years

MONTAGU'S HARRIER (*Circus pygargus*) - Eurasia, winters in Africa and India

WESTERN MARSH HARRIER (*Circus aeruginosus*) - Europe, western Asia; winters in Africa and India

PALLID HARRIER (*Circus macrourus*) - Africa. Winters in Asia, India

MALAGASY HARRIER, (*Circus macrasceles*) - Asia, India, Indian Ocean (Madagascar and the Comoros Islands)

PIED HARRIER, (*Circus melanoleucos*) - Asia, winters in India

MONTAGU HARRIER

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Source: The Hindu, PIB

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