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.
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- 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.
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- It will be an array of 64 interlinked receptors to unlock cosmic conundrums from dark energy to detecting extraterrestrial life.
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- A receptor is the complete antenna structure, with the main reflector, sub-reflector and all receivers, digitisers and other electronics installed.
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- It will be incorporated into the complex Square Kilometre Array (SKA) instrument.
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- 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.
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- The conservation status of the animal is the **'least concern'** and it preys on wild crab and fish.
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- The Golden Jackal is widespread in North and north-east Africa, Arabian Peninsula, Eastern Europe and the entire Indian Subcontinent.
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- In India, jackal populations achieve high densities in pastoral areas such as Kutch, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Haryana.
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- 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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Source: The Hindu, PIB

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