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Bar Headed Goose

- The Bar Headed Goose (*Anser indicus*) are wintering at the freshwater lake Hadinaru (which takes its name after a village near Mysuru).
- Origin - Central China and Mongolia (Breeding happens here)
- They can fly at very high altitude. They make the world's highest bird migration.
- They return to their homes by crossing the Himalayan ranges.
- [April marks the return of migratory bird species visiting India, back to their breeding grounds.]
- IUCN Red List Status - Least Concern

Three-banded Rosefinch

- Three-banded rosefinch of Arunachal Pradesh has been added as the 1,340th species in the bird list of India.
- It was spotted by the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) team at Sela pass (on the border between Tawang and West Kameng districts of Arunachal Pradesh.)
- Three-banded rosefinch belongs to the family Fringillidae, which are seed-eating passerine birds with a distinctively conical bill.
- This bird is a resident of southern China and a vagrant in Bhutan.
- It may be using the high altitude temperate coniferous forest of Arunachal Pradesh as a passage while migrating from China to Bhutan.
- IUCN conservation status - 'Least Concern'

Study on Invasive Species

- A study says that the "exotic" intruders have a vast and growing cost to humanity and the environment.
- It estimated that the invasive species have cost nearly $1.3 trillion dollars to the global economy since 1970, an average of $26.8 billion per year.
- There is also sign of a steady upward trend since 1970.
- Most of the price tag is associated with the damage to ecosystems, crops or fisheries, though pest-control measures were included in the research.
- A preliminary roundup of the top ten invasive pests includes
    1. Crop-eating rats,

2. Asian gypsy moth attacking trees throughout the northern hemisphere,
3. Tiger mosquito, native to Southeast Asia, carrying diseases like chikungunya, dengue and zika.

- The UN's Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) has said invasive species are among the top five human-driven culprits of environmental destruction worldwide.
- [Other 4 culprits - Land use, resource exploitation, pollution and climate change.]
- In 2019, IPBES estimated there had been a 70% increase in invasive species since 1970, in the 21 countries studied.

Invasive Species in History

- Australia - Feral European rabbits (early 1800s). In 1950, the government killed the rabbits by releasing the disease myxomatosis.
- Guam - The brown tree snake has eaten nearly all of the native birds and lizards of since it was accidentally introduced in the mid-20th century from its South Pacific habitat.
- North America's Great Lakes - Zebra Mussel (1980s and 90s) originating in the waterways of the former Soviet Union.
- American and European forests - Devastated by Asian long-horned beetle
- Hawaii - Puerto Rican coqui frog with no natural predators

Double-mutant Variant of Corona

- An Indian variant of the coronavirus with two key mutations, now known as 'B.1.617', has been detected in the US, Germany, the UK, Australia and Singapore and enhancing viral replication.
- This double mutant strain (with E484Q and L452R mutations) was announced by the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) on March end after it was identified in Maharashtra, Delhi, and Punjab.
- The Indian SARS-Cov-2 Consortium on Genomics (INSACOG) - a group of 10 national laboratories - has been conducting genomic sequencing of variants in India.
- B.1.617 has now been found in 8 countries. Approximately 70% of the cases are noted to be from India.
- The double mutation depicts two separate spike protein substitutions on this coronavirus strain.
- The spike protein is basically a part of the virus's outer layer, through which it attaches to the human cells, and invades into the body.
- Both these variants can alter the structure of the spike protein, making it more efficient in attaching with the host cells and multiplying faster.

- Such mutations can result in immune escape and increased infectivity.
- They can also create a neutralising impact on the antibodies generated from vaccines or the first infection.

ASEAN-EU Strategic Partnership

- After the European Union (EU) became a strategic partner of Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) bloc in December 2020, both blocs pledged to make climate change policy a key area of cooperation.
- The ASEAN-EU strategic partnership is a consolidation of the current range of cooperative arrangements and shared objectives that include,
    1. Economic cooperation and
    2. The EU's ongoing support for ASEAN integration,
    3. Cooperation on such issues as the response to COVID-19, climate change and green growth, sustainable development and connectivity, maritime cooperation, and cyber security.
- This partnership had deepened the ASEAN-EU relationship from a donor-recipient to engagement in economic cooperation that laid the ground for broader cooperation.
- The important parts of the ASEAN-EU relationship are
    1. Regional integration support, including the recent ASEAN Customs Transit System,
    2. The EU's range of integration support packages,
    3. The ASEAN Regional Integration Support Program (ARISE Plus).
- This strategic partnership may be a genuine trailblazer for region-to-region high level collaboration, which means there may be no need for individual strategic partnerships with states in Southeast Asia.
- Summit-level meetings are a key component of such partnerships.
- The strategic partnership was announced soon after the signing of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), a deal constituting the world's largest free-trade zone.

Source: The Hindu, New Indian Express, The Diplomat

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